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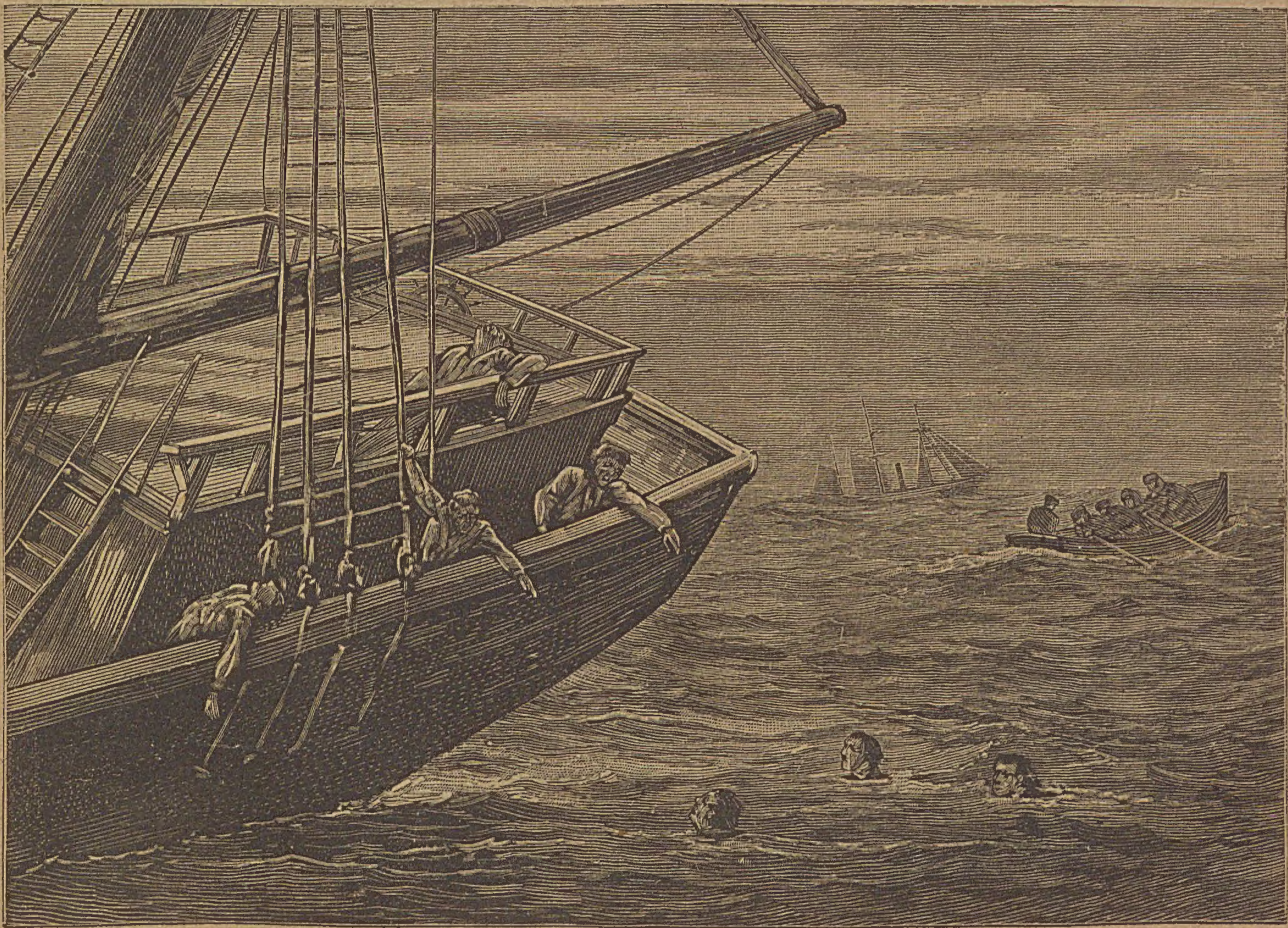
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DICK DART: or, THE FIEND OF THE REVENUE CUTTER.

By BERTON BERTREW.



“We daren’t go any nearer, sir,” said the boatswain. “You’ll have to swim for it.” Leaping over the side of the pinnace, they swam to the chain and climbed up.

DICK DART:

OR,

The Fiend of the Revenue Cutter.

By BERTON BERTREW,

Author of "Among the Sun Worshipers; or, Two New York Boys in Peru," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

"WHICH it's almost time I cut and run and give this blasted cutter the go-by. She's as taut as a bow-line and as tight as a cork, and can show a clean pair of heels to any craft of her length of keel that floats in salt water. But when there's a blue devil abroad that takes it into his unnat'ral head to make his appearance about once a day on an average, frightenin' people into fits, then it's about time for Kitt Cutlash for to come for to go for to clear out and vanish and vamoose im-mejetly to once, and stand not upon the order of his going."

The speaker was Mr. Christopher Cutlash, commonly called Slim Kitt by reason of his extreme attenuation, his bones sticking out everywhere as if he had been regularly fed on red herrings.

He was as long as a rail and about as slim, but any one who imagined thereby that they could handle him pretty easily would to their lasting sorrow learn his mistake, for he was a tough customer in a close tussle.

The revenue cutter Boxer, close reefed, close hauled, all snug above and below, was working her way up the coast of Hatteras one morning in early summer in the teeth of a gale of wind.

The cutter was in charge of a second lieutenant and two midshipmen under orders to oust out and break up a gang of smugglers and sand-pirates who, it was reported at the Navy Department, were working a great deal of mischief in and around Barnegat Bay and its tributaries.

"Which it's hard telling which is the worst fiend aboar this cutter," soliloquized Kitt, as he stood on the quarter deck and gazed off to leeward in a meditative manner. "Let's count 'em up?"

Kitt proceeded, counting on his fingers:

"First, there's him as I calls the Blue Devil, for I cotched a glimpse of him the other night as I was settin' on the windlass in the dog watch, and he was as blue as Indigo, all over."

"Secondly, there's the leftenant. If he ain't some kin to Satan, then blood's no thicker than water, and I've allus heard it is. There's as much of Old Nick in him as there is in the spook that walks these decks o' nights and thumps and bangs atween decks between the acts, and if he ain't straight for the brimstone part of Davy Jones' locker, appearances is mighty deceitful."

"Thirdly, there's Snapem, and he's worse nor the other two biled down in a lump 'thout seasonin'. He's Old Davy himself on four legs. He's the— Oh, let go, you beast! O-o-o-o-oh! L-i-i-i-ch!" Unperceived by Kitt, the lieutenant commanding the cutter had come up the companion-way.

He was a low-browed, brutal-looking man

of forty, with light hair and a mustache and side whiskers.

He was an uneducated man, who had been appointed a lieutenant and assigned to the cutter through political influence—never being graduated at the naval academy at Annapolis—and he was consequently brutal and overbearing to his inferiors in station, while cringing to the utmost limit of servility to those above him in office.

At his heels was an animal, which was a cross between a bull-terrier and a cur, which was very much like its master in disposition.

The moment the lieutenant saw Kitt his face assumed an expression of malice, and in a tone which he thought too low for the man at the wheel to hear, he hissed this sound through his teeth:

"S-s-s-s-s-s-s-ick!"

Instantly the dog flew at Kitt, and before the latter was aware of his approach, buried its teeth in his calf.

Kitt uttered the exclamation we have recorded, and kicked at the dog.

Bracing his paws on the deck, the animal pulled backward at that instant with all his strength, the result being that Kitt fell on his back on deck.

Then began a sanguinary struggle between man and beast, the dog trying to get at Kitt's throat to throttle him, and Kitt endeavoring to clutch the dog's neck in his bony hands and strangle it.

Over and over rolled man and beast, the lieutenant looking on with grim satisfaction. Suddenly the man at the wheel left his station. The cutter broached to and commenced jumping her bows under.

"Back to your post!" roared the lieutenant. "What d'ye mean by leaving the wheel in a gale of wind!"

"Gale or no gale, cap'n," replied the sailor, advancing, "I'd rather desert twenty wheels in twenty gales o' wind nor to see Kitt Cutlash chawed up by a mongrel terrier, and I'll kick daylight into that there dog, or my name ain't Ben Bowline."

Instantly the lieutenant drew his pistol.

"Back to the wheel!" he thundered. "Back, or I'll shoot you dead!"

"If so be I'm born to die by lead," replied the sailor, calmly, "I s'pose your bullet'll hit me, cap'n; but if so be I'm born to die by water—which I hopes is the case, and the salt-er the better, to my thinkin'—then you won't shoot straight enough to hit. At any rate old Ben Bowline is not the man to stand by and see a messmate gnawed by a beast of a terrier, and so here goes to kick the inside out of that dog Snapem."

There is no doubt the lieutenant would have executed his threat to shoot Ben Bowline had not a diversion occurred in the shape

of a handsome young fellow of about twenty years of age, who at that instant emerged from the companionway.

Comprehending what was going on he sprang forward to the scene of strife and caught Ben by the collar.

"Don't you get yourself in trouble by disobeying orders, Ben Bowline," he exclaimed, in a clear, ringing voice. "Keep back, I'll kick the mongrel brute off. I've received no orders to the contrary, yet, and—"

"Then you receive them now," roared the lieutenant. "And if you dare disobey, I'll serve you the same way that I threatened that mutinous rascal, if you are a midshipman. Wait till you receive orders before you undertake to interfere, when your superior officer's by. Let 'em fight it out."

But the battle was about decided.

Contrary to the lieutenant's expectations, Kitt at that instant succeeded in catching the dog by the throat, and he held on hard.

The animal's eyes protruded, and his tongue lolled out.

Seeing that matters were progressing to his liking, Ben Bowline gave utterance to a quick chuckle, and returning to the wheel, succeeded in paying the cutter off until her sails filled.

"Hey, stop that! Confound you, you'll choke the dog to death!" roared the lieutenant, alarmed at the probable fate of his favorite. "Mr. Dart! Ben Bowline! Why don't you interfere?"

"Can't leave the wheel, sir—the cutter'll broach to," said Old Ben, solemnly.

"Waiting for orders, sir, in the presence of my superior officer," said Dick Dart, the midshipman.

"Curse you both for a pair of mutinous fools!" thundered the lieutenant, springing forward to Snapem's rescue.

But Snapem, being in the throes of strangulation, and having no idea of taking it quietly, thrashed around violently, and succeeded in entangling himself among the lieutenant's legs, throwing the officer headlong to the deck, whence he rolled into the lee scuppers.

At this instant another person appeared on the scene.

Forth from the cabin door issued, just in time to behold the lieutenant's mishap, a young man about Dick Dart's age.

He, also, was dressed in midshipman's uniform, and carried himself very slouchily in it, suggesting the need of shoulder braces.

"Halloo, Brott!" exclaimed Dick Dart. "Better not interfere. Wait for orders."

Hoping to curry favor with the lieutenant, Brott sprang forward for the purpose of rescuing Snapem.

Dick put out his foot.

Brott tripped, and pitched head first into

the stomach of the lieutenant, who by this time had got upon his feet.

The collision sent both into the lee scuppers, and the cutter being just at that moment knocked well down by a blow which rolled her larboard rail under, they were treated to a refreshing salt sea bath.

"Port your helm, you lubber!" roared the lieutenant, as he scrambled out of the wash. "Don't give her such a full, or you'll take the sticks out of her. Let the leech shake a little and work her along easy, you fool. Port your helm. Hard down, and be d—d to you!"

Obediently, although he knew he had no business to do it, old Ben jammed the wheel hard down, brought the cutter up to the wind and held her there, where she pitched bows under at every sea, her sails flapping with a force that threatened to tear them from the bolt-ropes.

The lieutenant and Brott rushed forward upon Snapem, and each seized a hind leg, which they pulled upon with all their strength.

Kitt Cutlash held on valiantly, but perceiving that he must be vanquished at last in the uneven struggle—having two men and a dog to contend with—suddenly released his hold of Snapem's neck.

His sudden cessation of hostilities was unlooked for by the lieutenant and his assistant, who, all strain being instantaneously removed, tumbled backward heels over head upon the deck, flinging Snapem ignominiously through the air toward the lazy-board, and landing him at Ben Bowline's feet.

Instantly Ben delivered a scientific kick, which sent him spinning through the companion-way into the cabin, where he struck the floor with a heavy thud.

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" laughed Dick Dart.

"Ha! you're laughing at me, sir?" roared the lieutenant, who by this time had got upon his legs. "That's a serious offense, laughing at your superior officer on the quarter-deck—down in the articles of war. I'll have you court-martialed for that, sir."

"Beg pardon, sir; I was laughing at the dog. Never saw where that was forbidden by the articles of war. His movements were very undignified."

"And mine—"

"Ha—a! H—m—m—"

"And he tripped me up!" exclaimed Brott.

"He put out his foot."

"Didn't," said Dick. "You tripped yourself down—fell over my foot—your own fault, Brott."

"That's a lie! You—"

Brott had not time to finish the sentence, for he measured his length on the deck, sent there by a well-directed blow between his eyes.

"Ha! charge number two!" roared the lieutenant. "Conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman. You shall be court-martialed, cashiered and dismissed the service the instant we get into port."

"That's all right; but your favorite Brott'll go first. It was about as unbecoming for Brott to give me the lie, as it was for me to knock Brott down. Brott, a raw oyster or so on those eyes would help 'em—there's a few in the cabin ready opened. Kitt Cutlash, are you much hurt?"

"Not much, sir. Snapem lost a sight o' time a-tryin' to find some meat on me for to stick his teeth into," said Kitt, casting his eyes down, and complacently viewing his spare figure.

"How dare you choke my dog?" thundered the lieutenant.

"Which I'm not a-goin' for to hold still and be chewed up by a dog for no man, nor for you, nuther, leftenant. There's nothin' in any article o' war as ever I read as says you've got to lay down and let a tarrier gnaw chunks out'n ye, and I ain't a-goin' for to come fore to go for to stand sich nonsense, nor lay down to it, nuther."

Fortunately for Kitt—for the lieutenant was looking around for a marlinespike—an immense wave broke over the bows at that instant, and rushing aft, threatened to carry away the galley, out of which the steward rushed in a hurry.

"Keep her off!" yelled the lieutenant, as the mainsail flapped with a tremendous sound that threatened to split it. "Put your helm up, you lubber! What the devil have you got her to the wind for?"

"Beyin' orders in the presence o' my s'perior officer," responded old Ben, coolly.

"You told me to keep her in the wind and make the leech shake, and I'm a-doin' of it."

The lieutenant seized a belaying-pin, and sprang aft.

"Sail, ho!" sang out the lookout.

"Where away?"

"Dead to wind'ard—coming down like a race-horse! She's a full rigged ship with all sail set and a signal o' distress flying. She's either loaded down to the water's edge, or else she's sinking. Now, she sees us, and fires a gun."

"Heave her to!" ordered the lieutenant. "We'll stay here till that craft comes down, and see what she's up to."

Five minutes later the Boxer, under reduced sail, was hove to, and riding the rollers like a gull.

CHAPTER II.

Boom, boom!

At regular intervals the minute guns rang out.

As the ship came nearer, they perceived that her deck was almost on a level with the sea, which broke over her quarter constantly.

The quarter-deck was covered with people. Every sail was set and drawing, although in such a gale as was then blowing, three-fourths of her canvas should have been taken in.

Her masts bent like whip-stocks, and threatened to go by the board at any moment, so great was the strain upon them.

As she came near, the lieutenant of the cutter sprang on the rail, holding fast to the shrouds with one hand, and having his speaking-trumpet in the other.

"Ship ahoy! What ship's that?" he hailed through the trumpet.

"The Arminia, from Rio Janeiro. We're sinking!"

"Why don't you take to the boats?"

"They're all stove! We're running for the land, to beach her. I'll try and heave to. Send your boats aboard of us, for Heaven's sake!"

Further conversation was impossible, for the ship dashed to leeward like a rocket, rolling so as to submerge her yards, and the cutter's crew expected to see her go down every instant.

As she receded, her crew could be seen scrambling out on the yards, and they succeeded in reducing sail.

A second later she yawed, came around heavily, the sea making a clear breach over her, and came up in the wind.

Before this maneuver could be executed, she was a mile to leeward.

"Which boat shall we lower, lieutenant?" asked Dick Dart, excitedly.

"Neither."

"You don't mean to say you'll let that ship go down without making an effort to save some of her crew and passengers? I saw some women on the quarter-deck as she passed us."

"We can do nothing for them. No boat will live in such a sea. I can't afford to lose my men."

Brott whispered in the lieutenant's ear:

"Don't you think you can afford to lose three of 'em?"

"Eh?"

"Dick Dart, Ben Bowline and Cutlash."

"Dart!" exclaimed the lieutenant, leaping down from the rail, "would you really like to have a tug to save some of those poor devils?"

"Give me your orders, sir."

"That I shall not do, for I'll order no officer or man of mine to risk his life in such an infernal sea as this. But if you like you may take the gig and two men—that's enough to be drowned—and go off to the ship."

"I'll do it, sir. Ben Bowline, will you go with me?"

"Ay—ay, sir."

"And you, Kitt Cutlash?"

"I'll pull the bow oar, sir."

"Lower the gig!"

The gig dropped into the sea as light as a feather, without dipping a drop of water. Dick sprang in and seized the tiller, Kit the bow oar, and Ben Bowline the stroke.

"Give way, boys!" was Dick's first order.

And on the crest of a heavy roller they shot to leeward.

"What a shame it will be if they never come back," to himself observed Brott, shrugging his slouchy shoulders and grinning.

"What a pity it will be if the gig capsizes and drowns 'em all," muttered the lieutenant

in an undertone; but he was careful that the words should not be overheard, even by Brott.

"Steady, Kit, steady," cautioned Dick, as the gig darted away like an arrow. "We are going like a steam engine, and I'll be right on top of the ship before we know it."

They were already half way to the ship, and so ably had the gig been managed they had shipped very little water.

Suddenly Dick turned a shade paler.

Off to the southeast, a distance of half a dozen cables from the gig, a monstrous wave was rearing itself.

Its crest was covered with foam, and it topped over in the form of a sickle, threatening each instant to break and hurl to destruction everything that was caught in the whirl-pool.

It extended a mile to the southward, and its north edge would about catch the gig, which would not live a second if struck.

"Give way all—pull hard—hard!" shouted Dick, pushing the tiller down and changing the course of the gig from west to northwest, in a direction diagonal to that of the roller.

Realizing the danger, Ben Bowline and Kitt threw all their strength upon the oars, and shot ahead far enough to just miss the edge of the roller which rushed roaring and hissing by them.

The gig had shipped considerable water during this maneuver, and Dick put her again before the wind.

"Lay on your oars!" he exclaimed. "The ship will never come out from under that wave if it breaks upon her. Heavens! what a mountain it is. It'll sink her, as sure as fate."

As he spoke the wave reached the ship, and towering higher up, broke with a thunderous crash.

For a minute or two there was a roaring, seething maelstrom there, and when the mass of foam was hurled on by the succeeding rollers which quietly followed, the ship had disappeared.

"Give way!" shouted Dick. "We may yet succeed in picking up some poor fellow."

"There's little hope o' that," said old Ben Bowline, shaking his head. "The ship's sucked the poor critters down to the bottom like lead."

When they reached the spot nothing was to be seen.

"Pull a little further to leeward," said Dick. "If any survived they have been swept in that direction."

"It's no use," continued he, when they had rowed two hundred yards further; "they've all been sucked down, poor fellows. Pull back for the ship! Hold! There's some one, by Jove! Back water! Hold her steady—sol!"

They had come within an inch of running over a floating body, which was now within reach of the quarter.

Seizing it by its long and flowing hair, Dick drew it into the boat.

The body was that of a female, young and beautiful.

Whether she was dead or not they could not say. She was insensible, but it was impossible to determine whether she was alive or not.

She was literally covered with life preservers, so that it was impossible for her to have remained under water even if she had been drawn down by the suction of the sinking ship.

It was probable, however, that she had been washed overboard before the ship went to the bottom.

Dick placed the young girl in the stern sheets, supporting her with one hand, while he managed the tiller with the other.

"Give way!" he ordered; "there'll be a hard pull back to the cutter."

"If she'd square away and run down to us, she'd be doing no more than her duty, I take it," growled old Ben.

"If Old Davy don't have us in his locker afore we're half way there, spear me for a porpoise," muttered Kitt Cutlash.

The least swerve to the right or left on the return to the cutter—which, strangely enough, did not attempt to run down to them—would have been fatal; but Dick Dart kept the boat's bow in the wind's eye.

After an hour's hard pulling against the hurricane, they drew up under the cutter's quarter, with the gig half full of water.

The girl was handed up, and her three rescuers stepped on deck, where they were met

with three rousing cheers and a tiger, by the crew.

Taking the girl in his arms, Dick carried her down into the cabin, to a vacant state-room.

Wrapping her in warm blankets, and managing to get some bandy down her throat, he had the satisfaction of hearing her gasp several times, and then seeing her open her eyes and gaze around in a bewildered manner.

"Where am I?" she asked, in a weak voice.

"Among friends. Don't talk now, but drink some more of this. There; that'll do you good. Now, I'll leave you, and when I return, which will be in ten minutes, I shall expect to find that you've removed your wet clothing and are snug in the berth."

Dick left the state-room and went on deck.

"Put her before it!" thundered the lieutenant, who was pacing the deck, raving in impotent fury at the raging of the elements. "If we try to work up the coast in the teeth of this nor'easter, we'll take the sticks out of her. We'll have to scud. Put her to it, and be d—d to her?"

This maneuver was quickly executed, and the cutter dashed away before the gale.

"How's the girl?" asked Brott, slouching up. "Has she come to yet, thrown her arms around your neck, and called you her preserver? That's the model style, I believe."

"Mind your business, Brott," said Dick. "If you don't, I'll make you, in a way you won't like. You've had a specimen of it once to-day."

Brott colored and turned away.

Dick descended to the cabin, changed his clothing, and then returned to the girl's state-room and knocked on the panel.

There was no response, and after repeating the knock two or three times, he pushed open the door and went in.

The girl was lying in her berth in a stupor, from which he could not rouse her.

Occasionally she would start up, utter wildly some incoherent words and then relapse into a state of inanition.

Dick hastened on deck and informed the lieutenant of this state of affairs.

"Well," said the lieutenant, "it can't be helped. We can do nothing for her until we get into Barnegat Inlet and send to the main for a physician; which will be some time, I'm thinking, if this infernal hurricane continues. You'd no business to bring her aboard."

"What would you have had me do?" demanded Dick, indignantly. "Leave her in the sea to drown?"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, sir," growled the lieutenant. "It's your watch on deck, and you'll not get down in the cabin again till your time's up."

"I'll just step down and give the young lady a little brandy and water first, sir."

"You'll do nothing of the kind; you'll attend to your duty. Here, you, Kitt Cutlash, take your lean carcass down into the cabin, and see if the female you were fool enough to risk your life to pick up, wants anything."

"Ay—ay, sir," said Kitt, shuffling off.

"Stay with her as long as you can—she shouldn't be left alone," whispered Dick, as Kitt passed him.

Slim Kitt answered with a nod, and diving down the companionway, disappeared from sight.

Snapem, who by this time had partially recovered, had about made up his mind to go on deck in search of his indulgent master, the lieutenant. But when he saw Kitt his tail whipped between his legs with an audible click, and he slunk under the table, where he lay eying his enemy out of the corner of his right eye, the left having been effectually closed by Ben Bowline's foot.

"Don't you come for to go for to cut up no more of your capers about my calves, you warmint," said Kitt valiantly, shaking his fist at him, "or I'll make a finish of ye next time and heave ye overboard as dead as a marline spike."

With this admonition Kitt passed on to the state-room, where he found the girl in much the same condition as that in which Dick had left her.

He could do nothing but sit and watch her, at which pastime he had not been engaged more than five minutes, when Brott entered.

"By George, Cutlash, she's a beauty, I swear," he exclaimed.

"Which it's easy enough to see that, sir, if you've only one sound eye," replied Kitt.

Now, as Brott's right eye, owing to the hardness of Dick's fist, was in the same con-

dition as Snapem's left, he looked hard at Kitt, who was placidly staring at the deck beam overhead and twirling his thumbs in accompaniment.

"Do you refer to me?" he angrily demanded.

"Not any at all, whatsoever," said Kitt, solemnly.

At that moment, Brott, glancing over Kitt's shoulder, observed in the pocket of the girl's dress, which was flung over the back of a chair, a piece of paper, a corner of which was visible.

"There's a bottle of champagne in my ante-room," he observed. "It will be better for the girl, no doubt, than brandy. Go get it and give her some when she's able to drink it. It's in the locker."

No sooner was he alone than he took the paper from the pocket of the girl's dress, and put it in his own. When Kitt returned, he merely said:

"Give her a little of the wine quite often."

Without waiting for a reply, he went to his state-room, and taking the stolen paper from his pocket, carefully examined it.

"It was a large yellow envelope, bearing the address in a bold, round handwriting, which although somewhat blurred by the seawater, was still legible:

"GREGORY DART, Esq.,
New York."

"Why, that's Dick Dart's father," said Brott. "I wonder for what reason this girl is bearing a letter to him. I'll see, for the mucilage is so softened by the water that it can easily be opened without destroying the envelope, and resealed if I find it necessary to return it."

He unsealed the envelope, and found that it contained several legal-looking documents, and a smaller envelope unsealed, and on the sheet of note paper inside was written as follows:

"GREGORY DART, Esq.—DEAR SIR: You will find, on perusal of the inclosed papers, that you are appointed sole executor of the last will and testament of your old friend, Alfred Harding, late of Rio de Janeiro, deceased. It was the desire of Mr. Harding, on his death-bed, that his daughters should immediately be sent to the United States, where he wished their education to be finished under your care and guardianship. It was my intention, in compliance with the wishes of the deceased, to have both daughters sail on the ship *Arminia*, but to-day, as the ship is about leaving port, I have received information that Miss Jennie Harding, who is visiting a friend in the country, cannot complete her arrangements for leaving the country in several days. It has been determined, however, to send Miss Nellie Harding to you by this ship, the *Arminia*, accompanied by her old nurse. Miss Jennie Harding will take passage on the *Hyperion*, which sails in three days. It was the desire of Mr. Harding that no expense should be spared in the education of his daughters, and their fortunes will warrant such expenditure, Mr. Harding having left property to the amount of a little more than a million dollars, as you will see by the accompanying inventory of his effects. I hope, my dear sir, that you will assume the responsibility delegated to you by Mr. Harding, and care for the two orphan girls as if they were your own. With great respect, I am your obedient servant,

"JOHN R. THOMPSON."

One of the other papers spoken of was a copy of the will, by which the testator bequeathed all he died possessed of to his two daughters, Jennie and Nellie Harding, share and share alike.

Another document was an inventory of the late Alfred Harding's possessions.

"This girl, then, must be Nellie Harding," said Brott to himself. "She is delirious, and likely to remain so until we reach port, and she is placed in the hands of a physician, which latter I will take care shall not transpire until I have things fixed to my liking. She's going to Gregory Dart, Dick Dart's father. Well, we'll see about that. In the meantime, I will take care that neither Dick nor any one else knows who she is, and these papers I will for the present look after and keep to myself. And now let me think, for if the knowledge is to benefit me, as I intend it shall, and largely, a great deal of head-work must be indulged in."

He placed the papers in a drawer, and then sat down to think.

And then and there he arranged the details

of a diabolical plot, all directed against Nellie Harding and Dick Dart.

CHAPTER III.

THAT night, in a dog-watch, Dick Dart and a companion were under the lee of the jolly-boat, engaged in a conversation which was destined to lead to results more grave and threatening than either could have dreamt of.

Charlie Fisher was a well-educated young fellow of Dick's own age.

He was the only son of a widowed mother, and had been foolish enough to enlist in the United States Navy, a folly which he had since bitterly repented of.

He was very poor, and was obliged to send nearly all of his slender pay to his mother, for her support.

"Charlie," said Dick. "I have a plan by which we can make some money."

"What is it?"

"Let's write a sea story."

"Write a sea story! Why, Dick, we can't do it."

"That's all nonsense. We are both well-educated and possessed of fair imagination, and ought to be able to do as well as land lubbers who never saw the sea, and don't know the difference between a kedge anchor and a reef gasket. I've got part of the plot jotted down, and it's in my pocket."

"Let's hear a little of it."

"All right. We'll jump into it all at once, make the crew mutiny in the first chapter while the schooner's off Hatteras in a gale o' wind, murder the lieutenant, and such of the officers and crew as won't join us, pitch 'em overboard to the sharks, turn pirate and run for the track of Spanish treasure ships. That's enough for the first installment, and we can think up as we go on for the second."

"Will it sell?" asked Charlie, doubtfully.

At this instant a dark figure, which had been crouching on the opposite side of the jolly boat, cautiously arose and walked aft.

Slouching down into the cabin, he approached the lieutenant, who was sitting at the table.

"Lieutenant," he exclaimed, "there's a mutiny afoot on board this cutter!"

"What's that you say? Why, Brott, you're crazy!"

"Crazy or not, I heard Dart and Fisher planning it. They are to murder you and such of the crew as will not join them, hoist the black flag and commence a career of piracy. They are behind the jolly boat arranging the details, and if you don't believe me, come and listen for yourself."

Sticking a brace of pistols in his belt, the lieutenant sprang up and went on deck, followed by Brott.

Walking cautiously to the jolly boat, they listened.

The first words they heard were these:

"We'll kill the lieutenant first, and then the midshipman, if he won't join us. And the sooner we're about it the better."

"Are you sure it will go through?"

"Certainly, if it's well done."

The lieutenant waited to hear no more. He retreated to the mainmast.

"Call up the marines," he whispered.

"We'll arrest the rascals."

Without attracting the attention of Dick and Charlie, Brott went to the fore-castle, gave the order to the marines, and soon had them on the spot.

The first intimation Dick had of anything wrong was when the guard filed around the jolly boat and drew up in front of him and Charlie and the lieutenant touched him on the arm, with these words:

"Consider yourself a prisoner."

"What for?" demanded Dick, springing to his feet.

"You already know. Hold up your hands while I search you. Guard, upon the slightest offer of resistance, fire."

Wondering what on earth it all could mean, Dick submitted to the search.

The lieutenant removed everything from his pockets.

"Now take them to the run and put them in double irons," was the next order.

Before Dick could utter a remonstrance against this treatment, the lieutenant and Brott were disappearing through the companion-way.

They sat down at the table, looked the things over and found a paper which read as follows:

"Schooner off Hatteras. Gale of wind. Murder the lieutenant in a way to be here-

after thought of, and possibly midshipman. Corrupt the crew, a majority of whom can be won over, and the rest kill. Sail southward to the Spanish ships, hoist the black flag—"

Here the paper ended.

"The villain!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Murder the lieutenant! The killing is likely to be on the other side, eh, Brott?"

"It's a fearful plot, sir," said Brott, hypocritically, "And would have been likely to succeed had I not fortunately overheard the rascals. What action shall you take in the matter, lieutenant?"

"Action!" roared the lieutenant. "The infernal villain shall stretch hemp! He shall swing from the yard-arm to-morrow. Go on deck, Mr. Brott, it's time for the watch to be changed."

When the lieutenant was alone he gave free vent to his passion.

"The dog!" he exclaimed, striking the table violently with his fist. "The hound—the upstart! Now at last I have him on the hip and will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him. Ever since he has been on board this cutter he has been a thorn in my side. I hate him! And I hate that lean fool, Kitt Cutlash. Dart shall swing to-morrow, and I will soon find an excuse for sending Kitt Cutlash on the same road."

"Beware!"

The sound came from the forward end of the cabin, where a large flag was looped up in the form of a curtain.

With a start of dread the lieutenant looked up.

In the folds of the flag was a figure which was calculated to strike terror to the stoutest hearts.

Its face was as the face of the dead, and its glassy eyes stared fixedly.

A long and flowing robe of blue enveloped it.

One bony hand was pointed upward, and the other straight at the lieutenant.

"Beware!"

The warning was repeated again in a sepulchral tone, and then the figure seemed to sink within the folds of the flag and fade from sight.

The lieutenant uttered a cry of fear, and then darted forward to the curtain and drew it aside.

Nothing was there.

He returned to the table, and pouring out a glass of raw brandy, drank it at a gulp.

"That awful presence again!" he gasped. "This is the third time it has appeared to me, and each time it had uttered that one awful word, beware! Has it come to warn me of some impending calamity and bid me prepare to die? Just Heaven! I think the sight of it again will kill me!"

He drank another glass of brandy, but it put no courage in his heart.

Another and another he drank, and at last staggered into his state-room and fell into his berth in a drunken stupor.

At ten o'clock in the morning he awoke with a headache, and fit for any piece of devilry that should first present itself.

Staggering on deck he found that the gale had abated, and he ordered the cutter to be put about and headed up the beach.

Then he ordered the two prisoners to be brought out of the run.

Heavily ironed, Dick and young Fisher were led to the quarter-deck by the guard.

Dick looked straight into the lieutenant's eye, undauntedly.

"Now, sir," he said, "perhaps you will be good enough to explain why we have been treated like criminals."

"With pleasure," said the lieutenant, ironically. "Do you recollect the fate of a young midshipman—son of a man who was then secretary of the navy—who plotted to murder his superior officer and part of the crew, and run off with the flagship on a piratical cruise?"

"I do, sir. He and two other of the ringleaders were hanged at the yard-arm."

"Well, that is to be your fate."

"What! hung at the yard-arm?"

"You have said it."

"You are in a jesting mood this morning, sir."

"It will be rather a practical joke," said the lieutenant, grimly. "Boatswain, pipe all hands aft."

The shrill notes of the boatswain's whistle sounded through the cutter, and her crew came tumbling up from the fore-castle and hurried aft.

"Men," said the lieutenant, sternly, "I have summoned you to hear the evidence against these two arch traitors, who were plotting to murder their officers and seize the cutter for piratical purposes."

An ominous murmur ran through the crew.

"Mr. Brott, give your evidence."

Brott gave his evidence to the effect that he had heard the two arranging the details of the meeting, and added as much as he could think of that was damaging.

"Ha—ah!" laughed Dick. "You've made a jackass of yourself this time, Brott, sure enough. Why, you lunkhead, all that fiendish plot was simply the details of a story we were about to write."

"So that's all you have to say?" asked the lieutenant.

"Certainly, sir, that's all there is of it. Brott will tell you that we were talking about the story."

"I heard nothing of the kind," asserted Brott. "You were plotting to murder the officers and part of the crew of this cutter and no other."

"That's a lie, Brott. And if my hands were free I'd make you eat your words, if they choked you."

"That's enough," said the lieutenant. "Bravado will not avail you. Your excuse about the story is as flimsy a one as any I ever knew concocted."

"But it is true, for all that, sir," said Charlie Fisher, speaking for the first time.

"No doubt," said the lieutenant sneeringly. "It's a lie you invented in the run, I suppose. But if you couldn't have thought of a more plausible one, you might have saved your brains. Fortunately, however, I have further proof."

He produced the paper that had been taken from Dick's pocket and read aloud its contents.

"And if that is not as fiendish a plot as was ever invented, then I don't stand on the quarter-deck of this cutter," he ejaculated.

A more ominous murmur than before was heard among the crew, and one or two cried:

"Ay—ay!"

"There has only been one case similar to this in the history of the American navy," continued the lieutenant. "And that was the case of the son of the Secretary of the Navy. He too was a midshipman, and he was hanged at the yard-arm of a flag-ship by order of the commodore. I shall follow my superior's example, and hang the ringleader of this meeting. His companion I shall keep in irons and take him into port. Reave the whip!"

At the sound of this ominous order Dick began to see death stare him in the face.

He and Fisher united in protesting their innocence, but it was of no avail.

A small single tackle was attached to the shrouds about a third of the way from the deck to the cross-tree.

A rope with a running noose at the end of it was then run through the block.

Despite his protestations of innocence the noose was tightened around Dick's neck and half a dozen sailors were stationed at the end of the rope ready to run him up when the word was given.

At this point the lookout hailed the deck:

"Sail—ho!"

"Where—away?"

"Dead ahead, sir. She seems to be a large ship dismasted."

The execution upon Dick was postponed for a minute, while all eyes were directed ahead.

Her hull soon came in view from the deck, and in half an hour they were within a quarter of a mile of her.

At this moment the wind, which had been gradually falling for the last hour, ceased entirely.

The strange ship presented a most peculiar appearance.

Her foremast was broken off close to the deck, and was held alongside by the rigging.

The mainmast was broken about one-third of the way up, and it and the yards and canvas hampered the deck.

The mizzen mast was standing, but the sails were hanging in shreds from the yards.

Her bulwarks were broken in, and such of her boats as remained on the davits were stoven, and no one was at the wheel.

The deck presented a fearful sight.

It was covered with bodies, all of whom at first appeared to be dead, for they made no movement.

Through the glass they seemed as thin as

shadows, and their faces were of a peculiar color.

But they were not all dead was evident, for suddenly one sprang to his feet, waved his arms wildly, and then sank down again.

Then several raised their heads and glared savagely at each other.

Then several staggered to their feet and rushed upon each other, reeling and swaying as they went.

Others crept upon their hands and knees, and, seizing upon each other, rolled over and over in a death struggle, while others still remained extended upon the deck, as though already dead.

"That's a fearful craft, sir," exclaimed Brott, with a shudder. "Can you make her out, sir?"

"I can read her name on the quarter. She's the Hyperion."

Brott gave a quiet start.

The Hyperion was the ship on which Jennie Harding was to take passage.

"Lower the pinnace!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Mr. Brott, you must board that craft and see what in the devil's name is to pay there."

No sooner had the pinnace struck the water than her crew sprang in.

"Pull away!" ordered Brott. "Pull lively!"

As the pinnace left the side of the cutter, the lieutenant turned and observed Dick, whom, for the moment, he had forgotten, and who was still standing with the noose around his neck.

"Ah, my friend, I quite forgot you," he observed. "But we will attend to your case without further delay. Man the whip, men, and run the traitor up as high as Haman!"

CHAPTER IV.

"LIVELY, lads!" exclaimed Brott. "There's the devil to pay on board that ship!"

Bending to their oars, the men sent the pinnace through the water with a rush.

When they were within a cable's length of the ship, a man who had taken no part in the fighting, but who had lain as if dead on the deck, staggered to his feet.

The flesh had wasted from his form until the clothing hung upon him as it would upon a skeleton in a doctor's office.

His face was yellow and haggard, and his eyes burned like coals of fire.

He staggered to the rail.

Three times he attempted to speak, but as often failed.

At last he managed to utter the words:

"Back—back! For your lives, go back. If you would not die horribly, pull back to your ship!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Brott.

"Death and destruction. There's a foul fiend on board this ship. Yellow fever has seized us all. The men are delirious and fighting each other like wild beasts with what little strength still remains to them. Half of us are dead—the other half are dying. Leave us, before the foul contagion seizes you. Pull back to your ship. Oh, I—am—dying."

He fell back upon the deck, where he writhed in agony.

The delirious men, having exhausted the small remnant of strength, fell back upon the deck.

And then nothing was heard but groans and moans, and sighs and muttered curses.

Brott turned white.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "That's awful. We can do nothing for them. It's death to go aboard, and by remaining here longer, we run the risk of carrying the contagion back to the cutter. Give way, men, and get away from that infernal pest-house."

The sailors needed no second bidding.

They had rather face a hailstorm of grape and canister than Yellow Jack.

Bending to the oars, they sent the foam hissing from the bows of the pinnace as they forced her back towards the cutter.

Meanwhile, on the cutter, the most exciting scenes had been transpiring in the absence of the pinnace.

Several men had manned the whip and were about to run Dick Dart up, when Kitt Cutlash darted up and with a blow of his sheath knife severed the rope.

"Shame on ye for a pack o' ungrateful dogs!" he shouted. "Would ye murder the officer who's been the kindest to ye?"

Abashed by this bold act of Kitt's, which amounted to open mutiny, the men looked on in consternation.

The lieutenant drew his pistol.

His face was purple with rage at having his authority thus openly defied in the presence of his men.

"You mutinous rascal!" he exclaimed. "I'll not even give you a farce of a trial. You shall die!"

Just as his finger was about to press the trigger, old Ben Bowline strode forward and knocked up his arm.

The pistol fell to the deck.

Ben picked it up and thrust it in his belt.

"You old fool!" roared the lieutenant, "you shall hang for this."

"If so be I was born to stretch hemp then I'll hang for this here, no doubt, cap'n," said old Ben, coolly. "And they say it's an easy death enough. But I'd rather hang fifty times than have Dick Dart hang once, and so I tell you, cap'n."

"And hang you shall, you old imbecile!" shouted the lieutenant. "You need have no fear of that, and that lean traitor Kitt Cutlash shall grace a hempen halter at the same time. Man the whip, men! Rig another noose and run that mutineer up!"

"Hold hard, messmates," said the old man, solemnly. "Don't add the sin of murder to your souls. I tell you Mr. Dart never plotted no mutiny, and that I'll swear to."

"That's so!" exclaimed Kitt Cutlash. "He's as true to the flag as any man aboard this 'ere cutter. Don't you come for to go for to swing him up when he ain't done nothin'."

"Will you obey orders?" raved the lieutenant. "Do you all intend to mutiny?"

"Tain't a question o' mutiny, cap'n," said Ben Bowline, respectfully. "It's a question o' swinging a man from the yardarm when he's done nothing worthy of 't. Begging your pardon, cap'n, but I say Dick Dart shan't hang."

"And I say he shall! Reeve the nose and man the whip!"

Perceiving that matters had reached a climax old Ben sprang in front of them and proceeded to harangue them.

"Lads!" he exclaimed, "who among the officers of this cutter has been the kindest to ye all?"

"Mr. Dart."

"Right you are! Who's paid the most attention to yer comforts?"

"Mr. Dart."

"Right again. Now did it ever enter yer minds that Mr. Dart would go agin the old flag and turn pirate?"

"No—no!"

"And I say he wouldn't. The case ain't made out agin him, an' it's the cap'n's duty to take him into port and let him stand his trial."

"That's so!" exclaimed several of the men, who had great respect for Ben's knowledge of the articles of war. "That's so. Take him into port. Give him a chance."

"Right you are agin', my lads," said old Ben. "Now all of you who are in favor o' takin' Mr. Dart into port and lettin' him stand his trial, come over to me."

Fully two-thirds of the crew went over.

Old Ben had swayed them as no other man could have done.

With a roar of rage, the lieutenant sprang forward to the fore-castle gun, whirled it around so that its muzzle pointed full at the sailors, and seized the lanyard.

"Obey orders, you mutinous dogs!" he shouted, "or I'll send a charge of grapeshot into the midst of you!"

"Let it come, cap'n," said old Ben. "It won't kill us all, that's sartin, and the ones that escape'll have your life for the murder."

"Ay, ay!" responded Ben's party.

The lieutenant hesitated.

He saw that the odds were against him.

If he proceeded to extreme measures his life would probably pay the forfeit, in the state to which Ben Bowline's eloquence had reduced the crew.

He concluded to temporize.

Quitting the gun he walked back to the quarter-deck.

"You will have it your own way since you are so set about it," he said in a voice which he vainly tried to render steady, but which rage made tremulous. "Do you wish me to take the man into port?"

"Ay, ay, sir! Give him a show."

"Very well."

But the lieutenant had no intention of taking Dick Dart into port.

On the contrary, he determined that he, Ben Bowline and Kitt Cutlash should die by

the halter before the cutter crossed the bar and entered Barnegat Inlet.

At this moment the pinnacle returned, and Brott and the crew came on board.

Brott exhibited some surprise at seeing Dick Dart standing on deck alive and well, but he made no remark.

He made his report as to the condition of things on board the ship, and then took the lieutenant aside.

"Of course you'll not try to board her, sir," he said.

"No; it would be certain death to any man."

"How is it that Dart's alive yet?"

The lieutenant explained.

"I'll tell you how you can kill him as certainly as by the noose," said Brott.

"How?"

"Send him aboard the fever-ship."

"I'll do it!"

The lieutenant walked up to Dick and explained the condition of things aboard the ship.

"Now, Dart," he continued, "I am reinforced by Brott and the crew of the Pinnacle, and am strong enough to have my own way. At any rate, I shall try it. But I'll give you a chance for your life."

"Name it, sir."

"Those poor fellows on that yellow fever ship want relief. I shall not send any of my men on board. But you can take your choice of hanging or going on board of her."

"I'll go," said Dick, quickly. "I'd prefer to die of fever and escape the disgrace of death by the rope."

"Understand, I don't order you to go."

"I understand."

"You can take some quinine and some disinfectants. And I shall send Ben Bowline and Kitt Cutlash with you. They have mutineered and I'll have them no longer on board this cutter, except at the end of a noose."

"And Charlie Fisher? What will be his fate?"

"I shall take him into port in irons. Bowline and Cutlash, are you ready to go aboard that ship?"

"If so be I can do the 'poor critters any good, I'm willin' to go and nuss 'em," responded Bowline.

"And you, Cutlash?"

"Ay-ay, sir."

"Go below and get your traps ready, then."

"We'll not take much," said Dick. "It isn't likely we'll ever come out of that pest-house to need 'em."

"As you please. Man the pinnacle!"

In five minutes they had got together what they wanted, and the lieutenant handed Dick a stock of medicines.

"You'll have to swim to the ship when you get within a cable's length," said the lieutenant. "I daren't trust the men much nearer, and you can't have the pinnacle."

"All right."

"Good-bye, then. Shove off."

Instead of halting at a cable's length from the ship, the men rowed so near that they tossed the things aboard.

"We daren't go any nearer, sir," said the boatswain, when this was done. "You'll have to swim for it."

"All right. Come, Ben—come, Kitt."

Leaping over the side of the pinnacle, they swam to the chains and climed on deck.

CHAPTER V.

A CHORUS of groans greeted them.

From the fore-castle to the taff-rail lay the living and the dead.

Their color was frightful to behold.

It was a dull, leaden yellow.

Picking their way among the debris of the wreck of the bodies of the living and the dead, they made their way aft to a man who was sitting on deck, leaning against the mizzen-mast.

He did not seem to be delirious, and was the only one in whose eyes the light of reason shone.

"Help, help!" he gasped, as they came near him. "Water, water!"

Running to the water cask, Kitt drew out a cupful and held it to his lips.

"We're all down with the fever," he gasped. "It commenced when we were five days out from Rio. Oh, the terrible scourge! Go down in the cabin—there's females there—whether dead or alive I do—not-know—"

The man fainted from exhaustion.

Dick laid him down on the deck, and then all three hurried to the cabin.

The utmost confusion prevailed there.

Chairs and tables were overturned, giving evidence of the late storm.

On the floor was a woman.

They bent over her and felt her pulse.

She was dead, though yet not cold.

Separating, they commenced to search the state-rooms.

In the state-room into which Dick went lay a young girl.

She was not dead, but so weak she could not move.

As she saw Dick, her lips moved.

Bending down, he heard this one word:

"Water!"

There was a pitcher by the side of the berth.

Seizing it, Dick ran to the deck, filled it from a water cask and returning, held it to the girl's lips.

She drank deeply.

Pouring some medicine into a glass, Dick largely diluted it with water, and held it to her lips.

She drank it, and shortly afterwards went to sleep.

By the side of the berth lay a handkerchief. There was a name worked in the corner in silk.

Taking it up, Dick read the name:

"Jennie Harding."

The sick girl was Nellie Harding's sister, who, according to John R. Thompson's letter, was to sail on the Hyperion.

But Dick knew nothing of these circumstances, and consequently the name excited no surprise.

Going out into the saloon, he found that Bel Bowline and Kitt Cutlash had completed their examinations of the state-rooms.

The had found three women and five men passengers all dead.

Carrying the bodies on deck, they threw them overboard.

Going on deck, they performed the same office for the dead there, thus removing a part of the contagion, and making better the chances of those who still lived.

The officers and passengers were easily distinguished from the crew by the difference in their clothing.

Carrying them one by one into the cabin, they put them in berths, and making each swallow a large dose of quinine, mixed with the juice of some lemons, which they found in the cabin locker, and placing a pitcher of cold water within reach of those who were strong enough to raise it to their lips, they went on deck to attend to the crew.

These they attended to in the same manner, after placing them in their hammocks.

Their thoughts now reverted to the cutter.

A breeze had sprung up while they were at work, and she was hull down on her way up the beach.

Ben Bowline shook his fist at her.

"You're a tight craft, my lady," he exclaimed, "and ye sail like a witch, but there's one aboard of ye as the devil 'll get one day for sartin', and that's the cap'n."

"I'll see your hand and go one! better, Ben Bowline," ejaculated Kitt Cutlash. "There's one aboard as the devil's got a'ready and that's Brott."

"Forage around and see if you can find something to eat," said Dick.

Old Ben knew exactly where to look, and soon returned with the information that the larder contained plenty of provisions.

"Good, there's no danger of our starving before Yellow Jack takes us. If we've got to take fever, we'll get it on full stomachs. Ben, what's your opinion we'd better do next?"

"Head her up the beach and try to make port. The wind's shifted to the south'ard, and we can run afore it."

"What port had we better steer for?"

"Norfolk."

"But there's only one mast standing, the mizzen, and the sails are all blown from that."

"It's only blown from the bolt ropes. We can haul it up and bend it on agin. We'll have to rig up a jury-mast on the stump of the foremast, and get some head rigging on her, in case the wind changes to east'ard, so that we can keep her off the beach. However, as the wind's dead after us on the course we want to run, the mizzen'll answer for the present. You take the wheel, sir, and square her away, as I see there's a wind enough now to give her steerage way. Kitt

an' me'll go aloft, and see what we can do towards getting some canvas on her."

By the time enough canvas was bent on the mizzenmast to make it move through the water briskly it was dark, and operations had to be suspended.

Relinquishing the wheel to Ben Bowline, Dick went below to attend to the patients, while Kitt went into the galley to prepare something to eat.

Dick found that Jennie Harding had just awakened.

She was much better.

The fever had broken and left her very weak.

Giving her some more medicine and some lemon juice and water, he spoke a few encouraging words to her, and then went his rounds to the other patients, some of whom he found much better apparently, and others much worse.

Two were already dead.

Alternately watching, sleeping and at the wheel, the night was passed.

At daylight they found they had passed Hatteras and were making fair headway up the beach, considering the small amount of canvas that was carried.

At sunrise, a three-masted schooner bore down to them.

"Are you in distress?" shouted the captain, through his trumpet. "Do you want help? If so, we'll send a boat aboard."

"Keep off!" Dick shouted back. "Don't come nearer for your lives! We've got yellow fever aboard. Crew all down. We're bound for Norfolk."

Under less distressing circumstances, it would have been amusing to see how quickly the wheel of the schooner was jammed hard up, paying her off before the wind with every rag of canvass set.

She was soon far up the beach, away from the dangerous locality.

Descending to the cabin to attend to his patients, he found the girl able to talk.

He then learned that her sister had sailed on the Arminia.

Going on deck, he communicated this intelligence to Ben and Kitt.

"Phew!" whistled old Ben.

"She's in mighty bad hands, the lieutenant's and Brott's," volunteered Kitt. "To say nothin' of that imp, Snapem, prowlin' around between times."

"I own I'm anxious about her," said Dick. "And if the fever spares me, I'm off for the cutter as soon as I get ashore."

"And get strung up at the yard-arm," growled old Ben.

"No danger of that when we're in port. The lieutenant wouldn't dare, and if he presents our case to the navy department, it'll be worse for himself when the affair's sifted; the idea of hanging a man for writing down the plot of a story."

"Just as you say. But if you go back to the cutter I'll go with you. Kitt, let's see if we can rig a jury-mast for'ard."

Before noon they managed to rig the mast and hoist some canvas.

This helped them along considerably, and on the afternoon of the fifth day they entered Norfolk harbor.

The schooner that had spoken to them was also bound for Norfolk, and she had warned the health authorities of the port of the expected arrival of the fever ship.

When they arrived, they were at once seized and placed in quarantine, with no prospect of being released under a month.

At the expiration of a week, Jennie Harding felt so strong and well that Dick told of the foundering of the Arminia and Nellie's rescue.

He also announced his intention of leaving the ship by stealth and making his way by some means to the cutter.

Jennie implored to be taken with him.

He promised to do so if it were possible, and went on deck to consult Ben Bowline and Kitt.

Old Ben had employed his spare time in repairing the ship's jolly boat, which was now in good condition, and was fastened under the stern by her cable.

It was agreed that that night if the nurse fell asleep—which was almost invariably the case—they would make their escape into the boat through the cabin window.

Night came.

About midnight the nurse fell asleep, as predicted.

Dick tapped lightly on Jennie's door.

She was awake and on the watch, and instantly made her appearance with a small package, containing some money and some valuable jewelry, and also a larger bundle containing some changes of clothing.

Ben Bowline and Kitt were already in the boat.

Handing Jennie to them through the window, Dick followed.

Drawing a knife across the painter it was severed, and the tide carried the jolly boat down the harbor.

As still as death they sat, until the black hull of the pest-ship was lost in the gloom.

"We'll make sail now," whispered old Ben. "And we'll be outside and miles up the coast afore morning."

When the sun arose they were out of sight of land, heading for the breakwater, steering by the ship's compass, which Ben had managed to smuggle into the boat.

Toward evening of the third day out they sighted the coast some distance above the cape.

And a bad enough lookout it was.

The sky was lowering, and everything presaged a heavy gale of wind.

As night fell the wind increased.

Before ten o'clock it was blowing a gale.

They were now in a situation of the utmost danger.

To advance further up the coast would be suicidal, for the wind was due east, which brought them broadside to the sea.

To turn about would be equally as bad, for it would be presenting the larboard instead of the starboard side to the sea.

The jolly-boat commenced shipping water rapidly.

"What's to be done?" asked Dick, anxiously.

"Beach her," said Ben, promptly. "If so be as a craft can't go out to sea, nor up the beach, nor down the beach, she must go on the beach, and my advice is to beach her afore she founders and sends us into the sea, five miles from land."

"Which if it's to be done at all, it had better be done in a hurry," volunteered Kitt, who was using the baler, "for Davy Jones is right under the keel of this here jolly-boat, and his jaws is a gapin' to swallow us."

"It's our only chance. We must run her on the beach, and trust Heaven to cast us high up on the shingle."

Putting tiller up, Dick swung the bow of the boat off until she was before it.

On they dashed toward the beach, which could not be seen on account of the darkness.

But an ominous roar to leeward told that the easterly wind had knocked up a heavy surf.

In half an hour a long white line of foam loomed up ahead.

"Breakers ahead!" sang out old Ben, who was on the lookout.

A moment later they were in the surf.

Just before the breakers were reached the sail had been taken in and the mast unshipped.

They were now dashing ahead without canvas, but impelled by an irresistible power which has hurled many a noble ship to destruction.

The water seethed and hissed and roared around them, but Dick kept her straight before it, and so far no waves had broken over the stern.

A low, white line loomed up ahead.

It was the white sand of the beach.

An instant later the boat was lifted high by an immense roller, carried along for a second with the speed of a race-horse, and then dashed down upon the shore.

The boat had broached to as the wave broke.

She filled and capsized, sending them all into the undertow.

Dick, with his arm around Jennie, braced himself, and held on until the force of the undertow had exhausted itself, and then scrambled for the firm sand.

Before he had taken two steps, the succeeding roller caught him, whirled him over and over, and broke his hold on Jennie.

Struggling to his feet as the wave receded, he braced himself in the undertow, and dashing the water from his eyes, looked around for the girl.

An object was whirled past him by the undertow.

It was Jennie.

Clutching at her, he held on with a grip of determination.

Exerting every muscle, he ran for safety.

Before the next wave broke, he was so far up the beach that only the spray touched him.

Running up the beach, he sat down on the sand, perfectly exhausted, and looked around for Ben and Kitt.

"Look—look!" exclaimed Jennie, in a voice of terror. "They're down in the undertow. They're drowning!"

CHAPTER VI.

"By Heaven, there's something wrong there!" exclaimed Dick Dart. "Remain here while I help them."

Ben Bowline and Kitt Cutlash were struggling in the undertow, seemingly without power to extricate themselves.

Ben was making no effort whatever.

He hung limp and apparently lifeless on Kitt's arms.

There was something queer about Kitt's actions also.

No sooner would he get upon his feet than he would be dashed off them again, even when the force of the undertow did not seem to be very great.

Dashing into the surf, Dick seized Kitt by the hair.

Bracing himself on a large shell which happened to afford a lodgment for his feet, he succeeded in holding them until the undertow from the preceding wave had passed.

Then, by almost superhuman exertion, he dragged them both upon the beach.

No sooner did he feel himself on dry land again, than Kitt broke forth in a torrent of invectives, chiefly directed against his unmentionables.

"Blast them 'ere breeches!" he exclaimed, looking down at them with unspeakable contempt. "If ever I come for to go for to get where I can buy, beg or steal another pair, I'll tear 'em into rags and burn 'em, out o' spite."

"What's the matter with them?"

"Matter!" roared Kitt. "They came mighty nigh to drowning me, and that's a fact."

"How?"

"They allus was too long for me, blast 'em, and so I kep 'em rolled up about a foot at the bottom. No sooner had the jolly-boat capsized than down they comes, ketchin' around both feet, and the lining filled with sand."

"I might a got out all right, though, but just then along comes old Ben, hurled by the undertow, and slap he butts me with his head right in the stumick, knockin' me back into the middle of the next breaker."

"I seed somethin' war the matter wi' Ben, or he'd never a done that there nohow, an so I grabbed him."

"An' we'd both a-been drowned if it hadn't been for you."

"Why didn't you let go of Ben and shift for yourself? You could have got out alone, couldn't you?"

"Humph! D'y'e suppose I was a-going for to let Ben Bowline go out to sea as long as there was a chance to save him? No, sireel! If old Ben had a-gone to sea Kitt Cutlash 'ud a-gone to Davy's locker wi' him, an' that's a fact."

A low groan from Ben directed their attention to him.

He sat up and looked around in a bewildered manner.

"Is it possible I'm ashore?" he gasped.

"Sartin, old 'un," said Kitt. "S'pose you tell us how on arth you came for to be in such a fix."

"The jolly-boat struck me on the head as she tuernd over. That's all I know about it. Who saved my life?"

"Kitt," said Dick.

"Dick," said Kitt.

The story was told.

"Ye both had a hand in it," muttered the old sailor. "If it hadn't been for Kitt Dick couldn't have done it, and if it hadn't been for Dick Kitt couldn't have done it. Ye've both of ye got a friend in old Ben Bowline till he slips his cable. Is the gal safe?"

"She is, and answers for herself," said Jennie, who had approached unperceived.

"The good Lord's on our side, sartin," muttered old Ben, reverently.

Flash—flash! Crash—crash!

The lightning flashed, the thunder roared—the heavens opened and the rain came down in torrents.

A fierce thunder-storm—than which nothing is more terrible by the side of the sea—was full upon them.

It was as dark as Erebus.

"Run for the sand-hills!" exclaimed old Ben.

Off they went to the westward.

Suddenly Dick stopped.

"Isn't that the glimmer of a light ahead?" he asked.

"Right you are!" exclaimed Kitt. "Hooray!"

"Away for it!" cried Ben. "Marlin's spikes and reef-gaskets, how it blows and rains!"

Across the beach they went, through a cut in the sand hills to the door of a rough wreck-er's cabin.

Dick knocked loudly on the door and lifted the latch, but the door was fastened on the inside.

"What the devil's the row?" demanded a rough voice. "Why in the fiend's name don't you knock the door off the hinges?"

"Belay there!" cried old Ben, who was not in the best humor imaginable. "Open the door, you bloody land-lubber, or we'll knock daylight through it blasted quick."

"Who in thunder are you, anyhow?"

"Take a reef in your tongue!" exclaimed Kitt. "It's blowin' big guns out here and a-rainin' like the very devil."

"We've just been wrecked on the beach," explained Dick. "We're about used up. There's a female with us. Don't keep us out here in the rain."

"Why couldn't ye a-said that afore?" growled the voice.

A moment later a flood of light shot out as the bar was withdrawn and the door opened. It disclosed a large room with bare floor.

Although it was early summer there was a large fire kindled in the fireplace, and its warmth was very comfortable, as the night, on account of the storm, was chilly.

By the fire sat a young man about Dick Dart's age.

He was a low-browed, broad-shouldered fellow, and his face was villainous looking enough.

On the other side of the fireplace sat a woman of middle age.

She was bony and angular, her features were sharp and her black eyes glittered like twin beads.

The man who had opened the door was a rough, bearded fellow, a little older than the woman.

In his mouth was a short, black pipe.

Instantly he laid this on the chimney piece, and without saying a word took down a sou'-wester and put it on.

"Come, Dan, hurry!" he exclaimed. "Come along, old woman."

"Where are you off to in such a hurry?" asked Dick.

"To the wreck, in course."

"There's no wreck on the beach."

"There ain't! Then how did you get here?"

"We escaped from the Norfolk quarantine, came up the beach in the ship's jolly-boat and ran her ashore here."

"What wur ye quarantined fer?"

"Yellow fever."

"The devil!" exclaimed the man, starting back. "Then what in thunder did ye come here fer? Didn't ye know any better'n to come out'n a pest ship to this here house? Say, didn't ye—hey?"

"We've brought no fever with us."

"The d—l ye ha'n't! Come, get out o' here. Confound yer! D'ye want to give us all the fever?"

Dick saw that he had made a mistake in saying a word about yellow fever.

But he determined not to go out in the storm again that night if he had to fight for it.

"Come, out with ye!" repeated the wrecker, opening the door.

"Hold hard there, messmate!" said old Ben. "If so be we had the fever about our togs when we started, I kalk'late it's washed out of 'em by this time."

"Which if 'tain't, there's no vartue in salt water."

"And what's more, we don't intend to be turned out in the storm this night," said Dick decidedly.

"Thunder and lightnin'!" roared the wrecker. "Ye mean to say ye'll take possession o' a man's house, whether he will or not?"

He reached up to the floor beam and took from its hooks a heavy, double-barreled gun, loaded with 3B.

"Now, get out o' here, ye beggarly raft!" he

yelled, "or I'll put a load o' goose shot into ye."

The young man who was sitting by the fire-place arose and took his stand by the wreck-er's side.

Matters were beginning to assume a very serious aspect.

Jennie Harding now interposed.

She sprang to the wrecker's side and caught his arm.

"Don't!" she cried. "Oh, don't shoot them! See! we're not beggars—we'll pay you well."

She took from the pocket of her dress her jewelry box, and opened it.

Diamonds, rubies and pearls glittered.

"Look!" she cried, "we're able to pay you. Keep us to-night, and I will give you one of these."

She took from the box a diamond.

The wrecker's wife looked over her shoulders, and the fire of avarice gleamed in her eyes.

"It's worth a fortin' to us, old man," she exclaimed. "Keep 'em over night, and run the risk of the fever."

She gave her husband a peculiar look.

CHAPTER VII.

"WAKE up! Quick! Turn out, or you'll be murdered in your beds!"

This exclamation was from old Ben, who stood over Dick and Kitt, shaking them roughly.

"What's the row?" demanded Dick.

"The wreckers are plotting to murder us." "Heavens!"

Dick sprang out of bed, followed by Kitt, whose bones rattled as he struck the floor.

"They'll be up in two minutes," continued Ben, excitedly.

"How do you know? Why do you think so?"

"Never mind. There's no time to explain. Let's think how to save our lives and that of the young gal in yonder. Draw your pistols."

"They're useless—the powder's wet."

"We must use the butts. Knock 'em on the head as they come up-stairs. Be lively—take your places!"

They stationed themselves at the head of the stairs.

Three minutes passed.

"They're coming," whispered Ben.

The wrecker and his son came up first, abreast of each other.

The old woman followed after with the ax, urging them on.

Coming from the light room into the dark, the would-be murderers could not see the fate that awaited them.

Crack! crack!

The butts of the pistols in the hands of Dick and old Ben descended simultaneously upon the heads of the wrecker and his son.

They dropped as if they had been shot.

The knives fell from their hands.

Tumbling over, they fell against the woman who was at their heels.

"After 'em, boys!" shouted Ben Bowline.

"Don't give the villains a chance to recover. Upon 'em while they're down and the wits knocked out of 'em."

They ran down-stairs.

They were just in time, for the woman had struggled out from beneath the two men.

The wrecker had already arisen to a sitting position, and was looking about him in a bewildered manner.

The son lay senseless upon the floor.

As Dick made his appearance, backed by his companions, the woman seized the ax and swung it around her head.

"Stand back!" she exclaimed, in a voice of fury. "Lay a hand on me or mine and I'll split yer skulls."

She stood like a lioness at bay.

Kitt dashed upon her.

Avoiding, with wonderful agility, a blow from the ax—for the Amazon struck out viciously—he flung his long arms around her body, confining her arms to her side.

The woman fought viciously.

She snapped at his face with her yellow fangs.

She was a perfect tigress, roused to fury.

Kitt dodged his head backward and escaped her teeth.

"No ye don't, old woman!" he exclaimed.

"When Kitt Cutlash gits his flippers onto ye, ye'd batter cave in. Come along here, you she-devil, and lemme tie ye up!"

He dragged her across the room, still kicking and biting viciously.

Had her hands been loose, so that the woman's natural weapon, her finger-nails, could have come in play, Kitt would have got the worst of it.

Upon a nail, driven in the floor beam near the door, hung a number of squid lines.

Holding her fast by wrapping one of his long arms around her, Kitt succeeded in taking one of the lines down and winding it several times around her, confining her arms tightly to her sides.

Next, he threw her down on the floor and tied her ankles.

"There you be, old 'oman," he ejaculated. "Snug as a bug in a rug; an' sich a warmint fer fightin' I never see."

Her resistance being overcome, the woman broke forth into a torrent of invectives, interlarded with curses.

"Ye slap-sided pirate, ye can't stop my tongue!" she shrieked.

"Can't I, ole 'oman? Don't pride yerself on that 'ere," said Kitt, catching up a squid. "Shut yer onery mouth, or I'll punch this chunk o' lead down yer dirty throat, hook an' all."

He advanced upon her as if he really meant to execute the threat.

Her teeth closed with a click, and she contented herself with glaring fiercely at him.

He couldn't stop that, at any rate, unless he blindfolded her.

In the meantime, Dick and old Ben had thrown themselves upon the wrecker.

He fought desperately. But he was dazed by the blow on his head with the pistol, and they had the advantage of him.

They threw him flat on his back.

"Bring a line, Kitt!" panted Dick.

Seizing another squid line, Kitt ran to them, and while Dick and old Ben held the wrecker, he bound him hand and foot.

By this time the young fellow showed signs of returning consciousness.

He was speedily secured in the same way.

At this instant Jennie Harding entered the room.

Her hair was disheveled and her face was very pale.

"Oh, what is it?" she exclaimed. "I was awakened by the sound of a terrible struggle. What does it all mean?"

"It means that we all came very near being murdered in our beds by these wretches. And we would have been if it hadn't been for Ben Bowline."

"Which I'd like to know how Ben Bowline knowed as how they was a-goin' to butcher us?" said Kitt solemnly. "How in thunder did ye diskiver it, Ben? Ye must a slep' wi' one eye open."

"No, I didn't," returned Ben. "I didn't, Kitt, and that's whar I kim mighty nigh a-letting ye all be murdered, kas I had a warnin'."

"How's that?" exclaimed Dick.

"I'll tell ye. Ye see, gentlemen an' ladies all, the old woman who Kitt took the starch out uv so handsomely made my bed on the floor."

"Now, though the bed was made good enough I allow, and an' even better'n cud be expected o' sich a critter, somehow I cudn't get asleep right off."

"Mebbe it was 'cause I missed the rollin' and the heavin' o' the sea, but anyhow, though I was a'most tired to death, an' my head was achin' from the crack it got when we come ashore, I cud do nothing but toss and pitch and tumble, for all the world like I tossed and pitched and tumbled when I wur in the surf."

"In one o' them rollins I cotched a glimpse o' a light shining through the floor at the side o' the bed, an' fer want o' somethin' better to do, I put my eye to the knot-hole and looked down into the room beneath."

"The woman was sitting between the two men."

"She was a talkin' to them in a low tone, and although I couldn't hear what was said, I spected mischief at once, and made up my mind to watch."

"After a while they stopped talkin', and commenced to look straight into the fire."

"Not likin' to wake ye if there was nothing wrong, I crept back to bed again, pullin' the rigging a little nigher to the hole, so't I cud lay on the pillow an' look down upon 'em."

"An' now comes the part for which somebody ought to keel-haul me, sartain."

"Lads, I went to sleep."

"Old Ben Bowline went to sleep in the face o' danger, and when the lives o' three per-

sons, an' one on 'em a woman, depended, probably, on his keepin' awake.

"What made me go off quick I dunno, 'cept it mout a been that lick I got on the head, which made me first mighty wakeful an' then mighty sleepy, all of a sudden, but anyhow the fust thing I know'd arter that, was that the she-fiend yonder was a bendin' over my bed.

"Then I seed her go to yours, and then go down-stairs, soft as a cat.

"Lookin' down, I seed the two men a-standin' by the fireplace, each wi' a big knife in his hand.

"Then the woman picked up that ax yonder an' started for the door.

"Hold on a minute," the old man says, in a louder tone than had been used afore. "I feel kind o' sick over this bizness."

"He went out.

"The woman muttered something I couldn't understand.

"The man was gone about five minutes, an' that there five minutes saved our lives, fer it give us time to prepare fer 'em.

"Had they kim right away, afore I had time to wake ye and get ready fer 'em, they mought a got the best uv us arter all.

"An' that's the tail end o' the yarn."

"And horrible enough it is," exclaimed Dick.

He turned to the wrecker.

"What have you got to say to it all?" he demanded.

"Nothin'," said the wrecker, sullenly.

"What were you after—the diamonds?"

"What the good o' talkin'?" muttered the wrecker. "Least said, soonest mended. We failed in what we was up to, and that's the end on't."

"And what made us fail?" shrieked the woman. "It was you, ye coward! If it hadn't been for your white liver, what makes ye sick at the thought o' lettin' blood, we'd a had 'em buried in the sand hills afore this, an' we'd a been rich! Rich, ye white-livered coward—rich!"

"Which, if ye don't take a reef in yer blasted tongue, ye she-devil, I'll go a fishin' for it an' hook it out!" exclaimed Kitt, seizing a squid and approaching her, with the hook foremost.

The woman's teeth click fast together.

"I'll take yer advice next time," muttered the wrecker, looking daggers at them all. "I never was much o' a hand at managin'."

"Belay there!" roared old Ben. "So help me, if I hear another word out of ye till yer spoke to, I'll gouge yer eyes out wi' a marlin-spike."

The wrecker became silent.

The son considered discretion the better part of valor, and did not open his lips.

"Now what's to be done?" asked Dick.

"Stay here till morning and take a lay o' the land till daylight," returned Ben.

"What'll we do wi' these here warmints?" inquired Kitt.

"I'll stand watch over 'em till morning," said Ben.

He took the shotgun down from its hooks and placed it ready to his hand.

Seating himself in a chair by the fireplace, he stuck the knives in his belt and placed the ax across his knees.

"Now go to bed," he ejaculated, "and I'll go bail that ye'll have no more trouble in these wretches atween this an' daylight."

Knowing that old Ben would keep his word, and that there was no further danger to be apprehended, they took his advice, retired to their rooms and were soon asleep.

As soon as he was alone in the room, old Ben appropriated a piece of navy plug which he found on the chimney-piece.

He bit off a chew.

"Now, gentlemen and ladies all," he said, looking sternly around him, "I'm fixed to my likin'. And if so be as you make a movement or say a word afore daylight, you'll be fixed—but not accordin' to your likin', wot-somdever."

Old Ben kept his eye on the prisoners all night.

He seemed to enjoy the vigil and the navy plug.

At daylight Dick and Kitt came down.

Kitt went out in the shed to knock up some breakfast, and Dick took a stroll out on the beach.

The storm had passed away, the gale had abated, the wind had come around to the westward, from which point it blew a stiff breeze, knocking the surf down to a smooth

sea, and the sun shone out brightly as it arose above the horizon.

Altogether, it was such a morning as few localities except the Jersey sands can produce.

The jolly boat lay where she had been cast up on the beach.

Her keel was broken, and she was split in two.

Clearly, she could be of no further use to them.

But her sail, which was at the foot of the sand hill, was not injured.

A hundred yards to the right was a surf boat which evidently belonged to the wrecker.

Dick examined the craft.

It was clinker built, and would take them to Barnegat in safety.

He determined to have the boat, with or without consent of the wrecker.

When he returned to the house, old Ben had monopolized the wrecker's pipe, and was puffing away on some navy clippings at a great rate.

Jennie Harding was down, and Kitt Cutlash had breakfast ready.

The wrecker looked daggers, and the old woman was foaming at the mouth at the assurance of the four who had taken possession of the house.

"Now, you three wretches on the floor, we'll attend to you," said Dick, after breakfast. "Ben Bowline, what shall we do with 'em?"

"Tar an' feather 'em and set fire to 'em," muttered old Ben.

"Which, if justice is to be done, we'll sarve 'em the same as they was a-going to sarve us," said Kitt Cutlash. "Cut their throats, dig a hole in the sand hill and put 'em into it, throw a lot of quicklime on 'em and kiver 'em up. Oh, you don't like it, don't you, ole 'oman?"

"What do you say, Jennie?"

"Let them go."

"All right. But on one condition. Do you hear, you three cutthroats?"

"We ain't deaf!" shrieked the old woman, whose enforced silence had nearly been the death of her, and who now made the most of her opportunity.

"We want your surf-boat."

"Take her and clear out," growled the wrecker.

"We don't intend to return her."

"Ye may go to the devil in her, for all I care—and good riddance."

"Thank you," said Dick. "How much is she worth?"

"What's that to you? You ain't likely to buy her."

"Set a price on her, and you'll see."

The wrecker named a price.

"Show up, boys," said Dick.

They all went down in their pockets and fished up the amount in gold and silver.

"I have plenty of money," said Jennie Harding, "let me pay."

"Not much," said Dick. "We have plenty of rocks between us to buy the craft, and we'll sell the boat when we get into port and get our money back."

"Not much," growled old Ben. "He's charged us two prices."

"Never mind—the overcharge shall go on the lodging, for I swear the woman shan't have the diamond after her hellish plot. There's no use, Jennie, I say it, and I mean it."

"That's the talk," said Kitt. "Come, let's be a-going."

"Wait; let's load up."

They drew the old loads out of their pistols and reloaded and capped them.

Then they took the wrecker's shot-gun and fired off both barrels.

Telling Kitt and Ben to keep them covered with their pistols, Dick went up to the wrecker and his son, and cut the squid lines that bound them.

"Get up!" he ordered.

"What's the racket now?" asked Kitt.

"We want 'em to help launch the surf-boat."

"Don't leave me—don't leave me—untie me—they're no better to be untied than I am," exclaimed the wrecker's wife.

"That's a fact, old woman, but you'll stay on the floor a bit longer yet. Come along, you two rascals."

"Which you'd better mind yer eye," admonished Kitt. "Don't come for ter go for

to kick up none o' yer shines, nuther, or I'll plug ye as sure as my name's Cutlash."

The wrecker darted a fiendish look at Kitt, and muttered a low growl down in his throat, but he made no resistance as they marched him past the sand hills to the surf-boat.

"Catch hold, boys! Here she goes! Away with her!"

Down the shingle rattled the boat, the sea was favorable, they scrambled in, seized the oars, and shot her out beyond the breakers.

They were not out fifty yards when the wrecker's wife was seen running across the beach.

By strenuous exertions she had succeeded in breaking the squid line and releasing herself.

Seizing the gun she had loaded and capped it in a hurry, beset with a desire for vengeance, and ran with it on the double-quick towards the wrecker.

Dick saw the danger.

"Pull for your lives," he exclaimed. "We must get out of range or they'll pepper us nicely."

Kitt threw all the strength of his long arms upon his oar.

The row-pin gave away, and he tumbled heels over head into the bottom of the surf-boat.

Before he could rise again the boat broached to.

Luckily there was very little, or they would have filled and capsized.

By this time the wrecker's wife had reached him.

She thrust the gun into his hands.

"Fire!" she shrieked. "Shoot 'em! Shoot 'em!"

"What's it loaded with?"

"Swan-shot—two ounces in each bar'l—eight drachms of powder behind it."

"Ha! Good fer a hundred and fifty yards."

He prepared to take aim.

Old Ben threw himself down in the bottom of the boat.

Dick did likewise, dragging Jennie with him.

"Ha—ha!" laughed the wrecker, tauntingly. "These swan shot'll go through her sides like paper."

Bang—bang!

He discharged both barrels.

Like hail the shot rattled against the sides of the surf boat, but none came through.

"Hail and thunder!" howled the wrecker.

"The gun was loaded with number eights."

He turned upon his wife with a torrent of oaths.

"I got 'em out of the big pouch!" she exclaimed. "That's where you keep the swan-shot."

"I changed 'em yesterday, you fool!"

Kitt Cutlash raised his head over the side of the boat and took an observation.

Seeing that the woman had brought no extra ammunition, and that the fusillade was over from the shore, he determined to do a little shooting on his own account.

Resting his pistol on the side of the boat, he took a careful aim and fired.

The wrecker uttered a roar of pain and fell.

The shot had splintered his knee cap.

"You won't go snip shootin' in a hurry wi' them 'ere number eights!" shouted Kitt. "If you walk agin in six months, call me a porpoise."

"Away she goes," said old Ben, seizing his oar. "Let's get her over the bar."

CHAPTER VIII.

WE must now return to the cutter.

It will readily be imagined that the lieutenant and Brott were overjoyed at the success of their maneuvers.

They supposed the three they hated were doomed to certain death on board the fever ship.

And consequently they were in the best of spirits.

Not so, however, with the crew.

With the majority of them Dick, Kitt and Ben were prime favorites, and they did not like the idea of their falling victims to the dreaded Yellow Jack.

But the lieutenant and Brott were so overjoyed that they went down into the cabin, and opening a bottle of wine, drank to the certain death of the three doomed ones.

They drank deeply.

Consequently they soon became "Oh-be-joyful."

It was at this stage of the proceedings that

some irresistible impulse caused the lieutenant to cast his eyes toward the curtain.

Instantly he uttered a shriek.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "will it never leave me?"

"What?"

"It—it! Just Heaven! It points its finger at me warningly. It's there—in the curtain—in the flag—see—see!"

With a cry of terror he fell from his chair to the floor, insensible.

Brott looked toward the flag.

There was nothing there.

He walked to it and drew it aside.

Nothing unusual was visible.

He walked back to the table and looked at the lieutenant, who still lay on the floor insensible.

"Del. trem., old boy," he said, significantly. "You've got 'em bad."

Lifting the lieutenant from the floor, he carried him to his state-room and tumbled him into his berth, dressed as he was.

"Another county heard from," he muttered, with a laugh. "Now, I'll go and see Nellie Harding."

He found her so far recovered from the shock of the shipwreck as to have regained her senses.

"I'm glad you're better, miss," he said.

"Thank you. How came I here?"

"You were picked up by the captain's gig, in a gale of wind."

"After the ship went down?"

"Yes."

"Who saved me?"

"I had that honor."

He counterfeited great modesty, and looked away from her.

"We don't know your name, miss," he continued.

"Nellie Harding—and yours?"

"Dart—Dick Dart, at your service."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Nellie, sitting up in the berth. "Do you know Gregory Dart of New York?"

"I should think so—I'm his son."

"Oh, I'm glad of that, for Gregory Dart is the name of the gentleman to whom I am going."

"Halloo!" exclaimed Brott. "That's news."

"He is my guardian. And I am going to New York to finish my education and to live in his house. And you, his son, saved me from the sea? How strangely things come about!"

"They do, indeed," said Brott, suavely, and then he continued, under his breath, "more strangely than you think, my lady."

He commenced giving a highly-colored version of the rescue, putting himself in Dick Dart's place, and leaving out Kitt Cutlash and Ben Bowline altogether.

Then he gave the girl some wine and a sleeping powder from the ship's medicine chest, and left her.

When the lieutenant made his appearance, Brott took him aside.

"Lieutenant," said he, "you and I are very poor men. We have nothing but our silt salary to depend on."

"That's so, Brott, and worse luck, I've often thought it's that which constitutes the bond of sympathy between us."

"And we both love money, lieutenant."

"I do, that's certain."

"And I, lieutenant. Would you like to make half of half a million dollars?"

"Heavens! what are you taking about? Give me a chance."

"You have it."

"Don't joke on so grave a subject, Brott."

"I'm not joking. Come into my state-room and I'll convince you."

They went into the state-room, and Brott took the stolen papers from the locker.

"Read 'em," he said.

The lieutenant looked them over.

"Then the girl Dick Dart picked up is an heiress!" he exclaimed.

"She is, and her money must be ours."

"How?"

"I am going to marry the girl. You assist me to this much-to-be-desired result, and I will give you half the money."

"How do you propose to go about it?"

Brott then informed the lieutenant that he had assumed Dick Dart's name, and taken to himself all the credit of her rescue.

"That," he continued, "will make her very grateful to me, and gratitude is akin to love."

"Then your word, as commander of the cutter, will have great weight with her. You

must constantly speak in my favor, and tell her I am the best fellow alive.

"And supposing me to be the son of her guardian will be another spoke to my wheel."

"But suppose it all fails? Supposing she prefers not to take the step between gratitude and love, and declines to marry you; what then?"

"Then you must give me a leave of absence to conduct her to New York."

"Shall you take her there?"

"Not much. The whole of New Jersey, from Barnegat to Perth Amboy, is a vast forest of pines."

"Well?"

"There are houses and cabins in those pines, and in the vast cedar and gum swamps which border the creeks and rivers that empty into Barnegat Bay, an army might search for months for us and never find us. Once let me get her in such a place, and I shall find means to make her glad to marry me."

"It's a good plan," mused the lieutenant, "and it can hardly fail."

"It cannot fail. But not one of the crew must have access to her. If she finds out that I'm not Dick Dart, and didn't save her after all, there will be the devil to pay."

"All right," said the lieutenant. "I'll take hold of it with you—and I must say the outlook for a fortune is favorable."

The conspirators arranged their plans more in detail, and then separated, Brott going on deck, and the lieutenant into Nellie Harding's state-room, where after she awoke he busied himself for the next hour sounding Brott's praises.

In due time the cutter arrived in Barnegat Bay, ran in on the flood tide and dropped anchor between the North Point of Beach and a large, boggy island called the Great Sedge.

The lieutenant busied himself obtaining news of the smugglers.

He was not very successful.

The reason was that most of the inhabitants of the beach on both sides of the inlet were wreckers in league with the smugglers, and pretended to know nothing about them or their doings.

The people who lived on the main were principally fishermen, and they would give no information.

The light-house keeper, a shrewd fellow by the name of Horney, declared he knew nothing about them, but the lieutenant surmised that he was one himself and decided that he would bear watching.

For some time nothing was accomplished.

At length, one afternoon, a small boy was observed to paddle a skiff out of one of the small creeks that indent the bay shore of the beach above the inlet.

He came out to the cutter and asked for her commander.

"I am he," said the lieutenant. "What's wanted?"

"I must see you alone," said the boy, shrewdly.

The lieutenant led the way into the cabin.

"Now state your business in a hurry," he said.

"Here's a letter," said the boy.

He produced a letter, of which the lieutenant broke the seal, and read as follows:

"If you wish to obtain information of the smugglers, come at four o'clock to the gulley that runs through the barberry bushes below John Allen's tavern."

No name was signed.

"Who sent the letter?"

"Dunno," said the boy, twirling his cap.

"Where did you get it?"

"Dunno."

"You must know, else how came you by it?"

"Look-ee here, cap'n," said the boy, decidedly. "Him as sent that letter told me to answer no questions about it, and you couldn't get anything out o' me if you pulled me to pieces with red-hot pincers. If you want to know all about it, do as the letter says, and I reckon you'll find out."

"Where is John Allen's tavern?"

"D'ye see that house?" asked the boy, pointing to a frame structure two miles or so up the beach.

"Yes."

"Well, that's John Allen's tavern. Gi' me a dollar, cap'n, and I'll go there and drink yer health."

The dollar was forthcoming, and the boy made his way on deck, entered his skiff and departed.

The lieutenant called Brott.

"Take this letter, man the pinnace and go ashore and meet this man," he said. "You'd better land opposite the cutter and walk up the beach, so that you will be less likely to be observed from the house. If the man knows where the hiding-place of the smugglers is, make any reasonable terms with him you choose."

In ten minutes the pinnace was manned, and Brott and the crew had rowed ashore and were walking up the beach toward John Allen's tavern.

A quarter of a mile below the house was a large scrub of barberry bushes.

Following the path, they had gone about half way through the clump, when suddenly a sound was heard from the bushes.

"St!"

Brott stopped.

"Hallo! are you the man that sent this letter?" he demanded.

"Send yer men back, and I'll tell ye. D'ye hear? Send every mother's son o' 'em back to the boat, or not a word'll ye git out o' me. What I have to say is fer yer ear alone."

Leaving Brott and the crew in the barberry bushes, we must again return to the cutter.

About an hour after Brott left, the lookout hailed:

"Halloo, the deck!"

"What's wanted?" growled the lieutenant, who was on the quarter.

"There's a queer-looking craft off agin the South Point of Beach. A surf-boat with a sail set."

"Well, what of it?"

"Nothing, sir, only the three men that's in her look like Ben Bowline, Kitt Cutlash and Mr. Dart. And there's a woman aboard, too."

Seizing his glass, the lieutenant sprang up the rigging.

"By Heaven, it's they!" he exclaimed.

And then he muttered, under his breath:

"How in the fiend's name did they escape? I supposed I had doomed them to certain death on board the fever ship. The foul fiend seems to favor them. If they arrive on board the cutter, Dick Dart will at once expose us to Nellie Harding and upset all our plans."

"The ebb tide's running out at the inlet, strong, and a heavy westerly wind's blowing," said the lookout. "They won't be able to beat the surf-boat in till the flood sets and the wind goes down, which won't be till after dark."

"That's so, by Heaven," exclaimed the lieutenant, descending the rigging and returning to the cabin.

He commenced pacing nervously up and down.

"I must get the girl out of here," he muttered. "How is it to be done? Hold! I have it. I'll forge a letter from her guardian (she don't know his handwriting or mine), saying that he had heard of her arrival in Barnegat bay, and has sent a messenger from New York for her. On the plea that the messenger must return this night, and that the Hyperion has arrived in port, and her sister is safe with her guardian, I'll get her in the skiff, under the pretense of taking her to the mainland across the bay, and on the pretense that smugglers are about to attack the cutter, I'll leave her on the Sedge, promising to return for her before dark. By that time Brott will be back, and can carry her over to one of the swamps, where they'll not find her if they look till doomsday. When Dart comes aboard I'll tell him the girl has gone to New York, and then I'll find some means to put him out of the way, too, without arousing suspicion."

He sat down to the table and wrote a letter, put it in an old envelope addressed to himself, postmarked New York, carefully blotted out the date, and took it to Nellie.

She expressed her willingness to go at once.

"Come, then," said the lieutenant; "there's no time to lose."

Going on deck he had the skiff lowered.

Nellie soon made her appearance.

Assisting her into the skiff, the lieutenant took the oars and rowed rapidly towards the Great Sedge.

CHAPTER IX.

It was about a mile from where the cutter lay to the Great Sedge.

The lieutenant sent the skiff spinning across, and skirted the north side of the meadow.

As he was rounding the northwest point, and about to disappear from the sight of the cutter, he shipped his oars, and raising his spy-glass, took a look backward.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed. "There is going to be the devil to pay aboard ship in less than ten minutes."

"What is it?"

"I see the recall signal which I ordered to be made in case an attack by the smugglers was apprehended. Miss Nellie, I shall have to land you on the Sedge."

"What, on this island? What will become of me?"

"You must stay here until I return from the cutter."

"But suppose the smugglers happen to visit the island in your absence?"

"You must keep hidden in the reeds," said the lieutenant cunningly, his object being to prevent the girl showing herself to the crew of the cutter. "On no account must you leave your place of concealment among the reeds."

He rowed the skiff close to the bank and peered through the grass.

He could see nearly the whole of the shore line of the westerly side of the Sedge.

A quarter of a mile to the southward of the point lay a small sloop of about eight tons.

The sloop was at anchor, but her mainsail was set, and the jib, although hauled down, was not tied up.

It was evident that most of the crew were on shore, for only one man was visible on deck, and her boat was drawn up on the bank.

Nellie partially arose in the skiff to look over the bank.

"Sit down," whispered the lieutenant. "Here's danger ahead."

"Where is it?"

"A sloop. Peer through the grass and you can see her."

Nellie did so.

"Why can't you engage a passage for me to the mainland in the sloop?" she asked.

"Heavens, how rash you are! Would you fall into the hands of the smugglers?"

"Mercy, no."

"Then be careful not to let them see you. That sloop is one of the smugglers' crafts. I can tell her character by that black stripe over red painted around her sides."

The sloop was a fishing craft, and the lieutenant knew it. It would have been perfectly safe to engage a passage for Nellie in her. But of course this would not have suited the rascal.

A diabolical idea entered his mind.

He would leave Nellie on the Sedge, row back in the skiff and say that he had procured her a passage to the mainland in the sloop.

Shoving the skiff from the bank he pushed into a small cove that ran a few yards into the meadow.

"We'll get out here," he said, "conceal the skiff and hide in the reeds until the rascals make out."

They crept into the reeds, and peering through watched the sloop.

In about twenty minutes four men came out of the reeds, got into the boat and rowed out to the sloop, which then made sail, hoisted anchor and stood across to the mainland.

"That's fortunate," said the lieutenant to himself. "That'll give color to the yarn I'll tell aboard the cutter."

Then he continued aloud:

"I must go now. Be careful you don't stir from this spot, for if you do I won't know where to find you when I get back. And don't show yourself or make a noise, for there's no telling whether any more smugglers are on the Sedge or not. As long as you remain in the reeds you're all right. Good-bye. If I'm not back before dark don't be frightened."

"I'll try not to be."

"That's right. Good-bye again."

"Good-bye."

The lieutenant got into the skiff, shoved off and rowed back to the cutter.

"I put Miss Harding on board the sloop that's standing across the bay," he said to the crew.

In the course of half an hour the sloop entered Forked river and was soon lost to view. The lieutenant noted her disappearance with satisfaction.

"Good! the plot works well," he exclaimed. "Now, if Brott only gets her safely away to-night, we may consider success assured."

He waited anxiously for Brott's appearance, but no sign was visible until dusk.

The lieutenant began to grow weary, not on account of Brott's absence, but of Nellie's situation on the Great Sedge in the night.

"She mustn't be allowed to remain there much longer alone," he muttered. "Confound Brott! what's he up to? Why don't he come?"

To answer this question, we must return to where we left Brott and his crew in the barberry bushes.

It will be remembered that the concealed person who hailed the party ordered Brott to send his men back to the boat.

This Brott hesitated to do. It would be placing himself entirely in the power of the person who hailed.

"Come out and show yourself," he demanded.

"Very good," was the answer. "But may I be hanged if I say a word about the smugglers till you send your men back."

There was a rustling of the bushes, and a man stepped out.

He was a very peculiar-looking individual.

His shoulders were square, chest expanded, and as far as half way down—that is, to where the legs are inserted into the human frame—he was a well-made, well-proportioned man.

But what a falling off there was!

For some reason, some accident, it is supposed, in his infancy, his legs had never grown in length since he was five years old.

They were stout, as well as his body, but not more than twenty inches from hip to heel.

He consequently waddled about, a very ridiculous figure, for he was like a man razed, or cut down.

His hair was red as blood.

His full and bushy beard, of the same color, grew almost up to his eyes. Add to this a rough, slouch hat, pulled down low, and his features were almost concealed.

"Are you the captain of the cutter?" asked this individual, addressing Brott.

"No; I am senior midshipman."

"The devil! I sent for the captain."

"I'll do as well," said Brott. "He sent me."

"Well, I didn't send for you. Good-day."

The man turned on his heel and waddled off, when Brott sung out:

"Halloo! don't go off in a huff. It's all right, I tell you. Any bargain that's made by me will be sanctioned by the captain."

"Why didn't he come himself?" growled the man.

"He's sick," said Brott. "Can't leave his bunk."

"Oh, that's allus the case. Come aside from your men a minute."

Brott did so. When they were a little apart the man said:

"How much'll you pay me if I'll give you information whereby you can capture the smugglers and all their booty at one blow?"

"The government will give five thousand dollars."

"I'll do it," said the man. "But you must never expose me, or I'll be torn in pieces by the smugglers, and the wreckers, too, that's the reason why I didn't want to be seen by your men, for fear one of 'em might afterward turn traitor and expose me."

"No fear of that," said Brott.

"All right. I've got to risk it now, of course. Dare I trust you with my name?"

"Certainly. It shall be known to no one but the lieutenant."

"Good. I'm called Bill Binks. Now, if you'll come along with me, I'll show you where the stronghold is."

Brott hesitated.

"Afraid?" asked Binks, with a sneer.

"No. What shall I do with my men?"

"Leave 'em here. They'll be within call in case the smugglers make their appearance. I don't want to take too many with me, for we might be seen from John Allen's tavern. Come along."

Telling his men to remain where they were, and come forward with all haste if he blew his whistle, Brott followed Binks into the barberry bushes.

The latter led him through the bushes until they came to the strip of open meadow which skirted the bay shore.

A small creek ran into the bay.

Its edges were lined with low bushes.

Bending down so as not to be seen from the tavern, which was about a quarter of a mile

above the creek, they made their way to the bay shore.

Binks took a spy-glass from under his coat. He handed it to Brott.

"Look up the bay about eight miles," he said. "Do you see a low strip of meadow extending from the beach more than a third of the way across to the mainland?"

"I do."

"That's the Pelican," said Binks. "You'll see that the meadow on this side juts out from the beach almost in the form of a sickle. The part the furthest out in the bay that you can see, and the furthest to the southward, is an island called the Little Sedge. Between that and the meadow above, which is called the Middle Sedge, is a shallow thoroughfare."

"Directly opposite this thoroughfare, on the beach, is a small house, which cannot be seen from here, by reason of the sandhills."

"It is situated by the side of a swamp."

"That house is the rendezvous of the smugglers, and in the cellar is stowed thousands of dollars' worth of their booty, and that of the wreckers."

"What is their force?" asked Brott.

"Not more than four or five men will be there to-night. The rest of the gang have gone on an expedition to the head of the bay, which you can't reach to-night in time to capture them. But you can stay at the house and surprise 'em when they get back."

"A good plan," said Brott.

"Now, listen while I tell you how to get there. It will never do to attempt to take the cutter up, for you've no pilot, and you'd be certain to run the Egg Island Flats, if you missed the others. Besides, the smugglers couldn't very well help seeing the sails of the cutter."

"Take to your boats, and run up the bay, keeping well on the west side, so as to avoid the shoals, till you reach the mouth of Toms River."

"Row directly across the river, which is two miles wide, until you come to Coate's Point, which is where the river joins the bay."

"Then pull due east across the bay and you will strike the thoroughfare between the Pelican and Middle Sedge."

"About half way through the thoroughfare is an island a few yards in diameter, called the Little island. Then you will take me on board, and I will pilot you the rest of the way."

"I understand," said Brott. "Is that all?"

"Yes—hold on, though, there's one thing more. If the tide should happen to be low, as it's likely to be with this westerly wind, you'll find it necessary to get out and tow your boats through the thoroughfare."

"Isn't there deeper water in some other direction?" asked Brott.

"Yes. But a watch is always kept that way. You'll have to go through the thoroughfare, or you'll be discovered. Be on hand as near midnight as you can. I'll meet you at the Little island."

Without waiting for a reply the man turned away, and disappeared in the bushes skirting the creek.

Brott turned back to rejoin his men.

As he entered the barberry bushes he was confronted by three men.

"Halt!" said the foremost, in a low tone. "We've some business with you."

The appearance of the men was suspicious, especially as the upper part of their faces were concealed by masks, leaving nothing but their rough beards exposed.

Brott paid no attention to them, but attempted to pass.

"Hold!" said the one who had first spoken. "You are our prisoner."

Brott was a blustering, swearing coward, like his captain. When he could not browbeat, his influence was gone, as was the case with the lieutenant.

His courage oozed out at the ends of his fingers, as each one of the masked men drew a pistol.

"Who are you?" he gasped. "What do you want of me?"

"The first question shall remain unanswered. The second you'll soon know without our taking the trouble to tell you."

The men spoke in such a threatening tone that Brott was alarmed for his life.

Taking his whistle from his pocket, he put it to his lips.

The three men simultaneously raised their pistols and pointed them at his heart.

"Blow it," said one, calmly, "and then die!"

Brott dropped the whistle.

"Would you murder me?" he gasped.

The question was not answered.

Brott was instantly seized and bound. He was disarmed and a gag thrust into his mouth.

"Now strip him," was the next order.

In five minutes Brott was lying among the bushes, as naked as the minute he was born.

He could not say a word, but lay looking at them in terror and despair.

At a signal from the leader he was lifted up and carried out into the meadow.

Down he was thrown on his back into a mud hole, and tied by the wrists to a stake.

Then each of his captors uttered a low, taunting laugh.

"If the mosquitoes don't have a full meal off you, I miss my guess," said the leader.

"Good-night, Mr. Midshipman Brott."

They turned away, and skulking among the barberry bushes, disappeared in the direction of John Allen's tavern.

CHAPTER X.

It will be remembered that Charlie Fisher was confined between decks at the same time that Dick Dart and Ben Bowline and Kitt Cutlash were sent on board the fever ship.

In the run he had remained ever since.

He was ironed hand and foot. When the guard brought him his food, the irons on his wrists were removed just long enough to enable him to swallow his food and then immediately replaced.

Charlie had no knowledge of where the cutter was, except from the guard, who told him that they were at anchor in Barnegat Bay.

Just at dusk on the evening when Nellie was on the Great Sedge, the guard brought Charlie his supper as usual.

He unlocked the handcuffs, waited until he had eaten, then locked them again and went away.

He had not been gone long when Charlie, whose eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, saw something shining on the floor at his feet.

He managed to raise it from the floor.

A cry of joy escaped him. It was the key to the irons. The guard had dropped it in his hurry.

But how to use them was the question. He soon solved it.

Taking it in his mouth he managed to insert it in the lock and turned it with his teeth.

His heart beat quickly.

He determined to desert the cutter and make for the nearest land.

To remove the irons on his ankles was the work of a moment.

He was free from his irons, but could he escape?

He was confined within a few feet of the cabin bulkhead, through a crevice in which a ray of light now streamed, showing that the cabin was occupied.

Moving noiselessly to the bulkhead he applied his eye to the crevice and looked through.

The lieutenant was sitting at the table.

He had a bottle before him, and by the self-satisfied expression of his face he seemed to be well contented with the world.

As Charlie looked, the lieutenant filled his glass and drained it.

Then he arose from the table.

"It's queer Brott don't come back," he muttered. "What can be keeping him? If he don't come soon the girl will kick up such a devil of a row that she'll be heard on board the cutter, I'm afraid."

He went on deck without saying more.

"What wickedness is he up to now?" said Charlie.

As he could not answer the question, he applied himself to devising means of escape from the cutter.

He was about turning away from the bulkhead, when his hand came in contact with a wooden button.

Turning it, he found that one side of the wood-work moved a little.

This led him to suspect that there was a button on the other side.

He found that such was the case. Turning this also, he easily lifted out a small panel that communicated with the cabin.

The place had been cut as a means of egress from the cabin to the hold, and it was doubtful if any one on board the cutter had ever discovered it except himself.

Creeping through, he stood erect in the cabin.

He was at a loss as to his next move. One thing was certain; he must leave the cabin, or the lieutenant might return at any moment and discover him.

Replacing the panel as well as he could, he raised his eyes and saw an object that came near causing him to utter a cry of terror.

A being that was certainly not of this world stood there.

It was the spirit which had so terrified the lieutenant on several occasions.

As Charlie shrank back from it, it raised its hand and pointed to the cabin windows.

"Depart through them," it said, in unearthly tones. "Stay not, for danger threatens. Swim for the Great Sedge. There is one there who needs you. It is dead astern. Heed my warning."

The figure continued pointing toward the window.

Unable to take his eyes off it, Charlie backed away from the fearful presence, descended feet foremost through the window, and dropped noiselessly into the bay.

The wind had fallen, and the flood tide had swung the cutter's stern around toward the west.

Charlie heeded the specter's warning.

He struck out astern, in a line with the cutter, not knowing in darkness where his course would carry him.

He had not been gone five minutes when the lieutenant entered the cabin.

On the table lay a folded paper. Taking it up, he read these words:

"Beware! The day of retribution is not far distant!"

He shuddered, and looked around fearfully.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "That was not on the table when I entered the cabin, and no one has entered since. It must have been that invisible presence. Just Heaven! I am a haunted man!"

There was a slight rustling of the curtains as of a gentle wind.

A soft, sighing sound pervaded the stillness of the cabin, and then these words were whispered:

"Beware—beware! The day of your doom is near!"

Staggering forward, the lieutenant lifted the curtain. No living thing was there.

With a low cry of fear he reeled back to the center of the cabin and fell senseless on the floor.

Charlie Fisher swam steadily onward.

He was a perfect master, and could have remained in the water for hours where there was no seaway.

Presently he saw a low, dark line looming up ahead.

It was the easternmost island of the Great Sedge.

He climbed out on the low bank and looked around him.

The interior could not be seen, for it was hidden by the line of reeds that lined the margin of the bay.

Pushing his way through the reeds, he saw by the dim light of the stars that he had landed on a low boggy place, covered thickly with pond-holes.

Supposing this to be the narrow strip of meadow which in Barnegat generally interposes between the water and the pine woods, he proceeded across it.

His progress was soon stopped by another line of reeds. On the other side of them was again the dark waters of the bay.

He now found that he was on an island. How far he was from the mainland or in which direction it was he could not tell.

But he must get off the island, for his escape would soon be discovered, and in the morning he would be searched for and found.

The penalty of desertion might be made death. And he knew enough of the lieutenant's vindictive nature to be aware that he would not hesitate to enforce the extreme penalty.

Scanning the heavens, he soon found the north star.

This gave him his bearings. He knew that the mainland must be to the westward.

How far off it was he did not know.

But he determined to swim for it and reach it or die in the attempt.

Setting his face to the westward, he made his way across the meadow, plunging through the pond-holes, and occasionally miring in the mud above the knees.

A reed bunch checked his progress.

Forcing his way through it, he found himself on the edge of a narrow thoroughfare,

across which the line of reeds that grew up on the other bank could be dimly seen.

Becoming desperate, he did not stop to think of finding a way around the thoroughfare, or even looking for the narrowest part, but plunged bodily in and succeeded in wading across.

Continuing westward, he crossed a large tract of open meadow, interspersed with pond-holes and covered with grass about a foot high.

Again he came to a line of reeds.

Pushing through them, water again met his gaze. He was on the western shore of the Great Sedge, and a body of water miles in extent lay between him and the mainland.

He had no idea how far it was, and he determined to try to reach it.

Anything was preferable to being taken on board the cutter, and tried as a deserter.

He preferred to drown, if he could not reach the mainland.

He was about to plunge in when he imagined that he heard a faint cry to the northward.

Listening intently, he heard the cry repeated.

It was a cry for help and it was in a woman's voice.

Charlie Fisher never allowed an appeal of that nature to pass unheeded.

The cry seemed to come from the northward.

Striking across the meadow, he hurried in that direction.

He had reached the reeds on the northerly shore of the Great Sedge, when a dark figure suddenly arose and confronted him.

A pistol barrel gleamed in the air a moment and then descended.

With a low moan Charlie fell.

We must now return to Brott, whom we left naked in the mud-hole.

He struggled hard to release himself, but it was of no avail.

Neither could he cry out, for the gag stopped his mouth.

The mosquitoes troubled him very much. As it began to grow dusk their stings were fearful.

As it grew darker they settled upon him in swarms.

Brott was in great agony.

He could not endure the torture much longer. He would die long before the night was over.

Why did not his men look him up?

The truth was, he had made himself so obnoxious to them by trying to ingratiate himself into the favor of the lieutenant that they cared very little what became of him.

If he were in trouble, he might get out as best he could.

Their orders were to remain in the barberry bushes, and they were not going to leave them to go out on the meadow among the mosquitoes to hunt Brott up.

The rope by which Brott was fastened to the stake was fastened with three or four half-hitches.

Under these was a nail to prevent the rope slipping down.

A bright idea entered Brott's mind.

He knew that if he could remove the gag he could make his voice heard by his men, and he thought he had found a way to do it.

Raising himself by almost superhuman exertions upon his knees, he found that he could reach the nail with his mouth.

Opening his mouth wide, he placed it over the nail.

It had a large head, and easily dragged out half the gag.

The second attempt was fully as successful, but did not result as pleasantly to Brott.

As the nail, with the gag attached, was leaving his mouth, his knees slipped on the soft mud, and he fell forward.

The end of the nail caught on his front teeth, breaking off at the root and cutting a deep gash in his lip.

Brott fell forward at full length, burying his face a foot deep in the mud.

When he managed to scramble out his face was the same color as his disposition.

"Oh!" he roared. "Oh-h-h-h!"

Then he commenced to curse everything and everybody black and blue, and ended by shrieking at the top of his voice for his men.

They were presently heard tumbling through the barberry bushes.

When they reached the spot he was still roaring.

They rushed up to the mud-hole and halted.

Brott's face presented a terrible appearance.

The mud had made it, and his body was as black as jet, which was streaked red with the blood that had flowed from the cut in his lip.

"Billee," to his chum said old Sam Sawyer, the carpenter's mate, who knew perfectly well it was Brott, "hyar's a mongrel—half an' half—streak o' black an' a streak o' red, an' a streak o' the same mixed. Billee, it's the devil wi' his tail cut off an' tied to a stake and ochred. Let's git."

CHAPTER XI.

"COME back, you fools!" yelled Brott. "You dolts, you idiots! don't you know your own officer?"

"Billee," said old Sam, "is the devil a osifer aboard this cutter?"

"As near that as anything, Sam. Mebbe you'd better hold a parley wi' that striped critter. Mebbe he wants to engage the spare bunk next the cap'n?"

"Tain't likely he can do much damage," said Sam. "'Cause why, he be tied to a stake. I say, you warmint, be you the devil or be you only a imp?"

"I'm neither, you lunkheads. I'm Brott."

"Lord love us," said Sam. "I believe it does sound like Mr. Brott's voice. The Old Harry's swallowed him, sartin."

"You dolts!" roared Brott. "You curs! You jackasses! I'm Brott, I tell you. I'm tied to a stake in this mud hole, the mosquitoes are devouring me alive. If you don't release me this instant I'll have you all lashed to death with the cat if ever I live to get back to the cutter."

At this one of the men dashed in and quickly cut the rope that bound Brott, who ran out of the hole.

"Lord save us!" said old Sam. "You're all turned black. You're not long for this world, sir, you're a-mortifyin'."

"It's dirt, you old fool!" roared Brott. "Mud! Mud out of that infernal hole! Give me something to cover my nakedness or these cursed mosquitoes will be the death of me."

One of the men took off his coat and threw it over Brott's shoulders.

"Can't gi' ye our breeches, sir," said old Sam. "'Cause why, we can't spare 'em. Likewise, it ain't necessary, sir, 'cause why, you've got a very good linin' o' mud, an' the hide don't show."

"Go to the devil!" roared Brott. "Back to the boat in a hurry—I've important information to communicate to the lieutenant."

They hurried back to the boat.

Before they rowed back to the cutter, Brott threw himself into the bay, and by hard work managed to scrub the thickest of the mud off his skin.

On the trip back to the cutter he related the circumstances of his capture.

Outwardly the men sympathized with him, of course, but inwardly they laughed delightedly, and swore that if the smugglers had done it, the smugglers were very good fellows.

When the cutter was reached Brott hastened down into the cabin.

He was surprised to find the lieutenant lying on the floor in a swoon.

Lifting him up he seized a glass of whisky from the table and poured a part of the contents down his throat.

Then he bundled him on the sofa and left him.

"He'll come to, I reckon," he muttered.

"And if he don't he may die and be darned."

Going into his stateroom he dressed himself.

When he returned the lieutenant was recovering his senses.

"Whisky!" he gasped.

Filling another glass with whisky Brott handed it to the lieutenant, who drank it at a gulp.

"The specter!" he groaned. "My God, will it never leave me in peace? Must I always be haunted by its awful presence?"

"Have you seen it again?"

"Yes—yes! But just now it appeared to me. It pointed its long hand warningly at me and spoke some terrible words. Oh, it was awful!"

The lieutenant hid his face in his hands.

Presently he looked up.

"Make your report," he said, in a hoarse voice.

Brott related the information that Bill Binks had communicated.

"Hah!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "That's news! At twelve o'clock, he said, we must be at the Pelican, eh?"

"Yes. And as it is nearly nine now, we must lose no time."

"You're not to go, Brott."

The lieutenant then related his actions in regard to Nellie Harding.

"You must take the skiff and go off to her," he demanded. "She will be frightened nearly to death if she is left alone on the Sedge much longer."

"How long a leave of absence will you grant me?"

"You had better return some time to-morrow to avoid suspicion. I will say that you are gone to the mainland after information about the smugglers. You can return under the same pretense, and visit the girl as often as may be necessary. Where do you intend to take her?"

"To a place I know of. A place so far in the center of a dense swamp that she can never find her way out, even if left unguarded."

"But she must not be left unwatched. She might wander so far that you couldn't find her."

"Have no fear. She will be placed in a hut and guarded by an old hag who is so lynx-eyed that she seems never to sleep."

"Very good. Lose no more time. That rascal Dick and his chums may come on board at any minute, and I would have you gone before they arrive."

Brott went on deck, entered the skiff, took up the oars and pulled away towards the Great Sedge.

The lieutenant went among the men and informed them that they were to make a night attack on the smugglers.

"Lower the pinnace," he ordered. "Eight men besides myself will be enough, and they can each pull an oar. Be lively now, for we've no time to lose."

In a few minutes the men were armed and in the boat, which pulled off in the darkness up the bay towards the Pelican.

Brott pulled a lively oar in the skiff.

But he had not accomplished half the distance to the Sedge when he heard the creaking of oars.

A moment later the hull of a boat loomed up in the darkness.

The skiff was low in the water and could not as yet be seen by the approaching craft, which was headed for the cutter.

Brott's mind was filled with the smugglers, and he naturally took this to be one of their boats.

Since his rough treatment by them a few hours before, he had no wish to fall into their hands a second time.

If they were about to make an attack on the cutter the lieutenant might bear the brunt and danger of it.

As for himself, he preferred to be out of harm's way.

Quick as thought he changed the direction of the skiff until it was going at right angles to the course of the approaching boat.

A few strokes would take him out of harm's way. But fate was not kind to him.

In his haste he unshipped an oar and fell sprawling to the bottom of the skiff.

"Boat ahoy!" hailed a voice.

Brott made frantic efforts to ship his oar and get to rowing position upon the seat.

"Boat ahoy!" growled a rough voice, in a different tone from the first. "Lay on your oars. Pull another stroke and we'll send a shot into ye atween wind and water."

CHAPTER XII.

"Good Lord," groaned Brott, "it's the smugglers! They'll murder me this time certain. What shall I do?"

As he dared not do anything else, he rested on his oars and waited for the strange craft to come up.

As it drew alongside he saw that it was a large surf boat.

Two men were at the oars and a third sat in the stern, handling the steering oar.

"Boat ahoy!" hailed the person in the surf boat. "Are you from the cutter?"

Brott recognized the voice. A sigh of relief escaped him.

"Is that you, Dick Dart?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. What are you doing out here, Brott?"

"On secret service. Who's aboard of you?"

"Ben Bowline, Kitt Cutlash and Miss Jennie Harding."

"Heavens!" muttered Brott to himself. "Nellie's sister! Now there will be the dickens to pay."

"All well aboard the cutter?" asked Dick.

"Yes. But I must be off. You'll get all the news when you go aboard."

They parted company, Brott pulling off in the direction of the sedge, and the surf-boat towards the cutter, whose lights could be seen in the distance.

They were still some distance from the cutter when the pinnace dashed across the bows.

"Boat, ahoy!" sang out the lieutenant.

"What boat's that?"

"Surf-boat, sir, with Mr. Dart aboard."

"Row up here."

"Ay—ay, sir."

Dick steered so that the pinnace and surf-boat lay side by side.

"What woman have you got aboard?" growled the lieutenant.

"Miss Jennie Harding, sir, from the Hyperion."

"Glad she's safe. Hey, you fellow in the bow of the pinnace, go aboard of the surf-boat."

"Come on board the pinnace, Mr. Dart," continued the lieutenant. "We're about to make an attack on the smugglers."

"Ay—ay, sir," said Dick.

"Good-bye, Jennie," he continued. "I suppose we'll be back some time to-night, though I have not an idea where we are going."

"Good-night," said Jennie, "and do be careful of yourself."

"All right."

"Come—come, Mr. Dart," said the lieutenant. "We're in a hurry. Be lively!"

"Ay—ay!"

Dick went into the cutter and took his seat in the bow.

"Give way."

The lieutenant looked at his compass and shaped his course about northwest, so as to avoid the Egg Island flats, and struck the meadows a mile or so to the southward of Sheepshead Point.

Then he intended to skirt the meadow to Goodluck Point, cross the river to Coates' Point, and then row east for the Pelican thoroughfare, and take Bill Binks off the Little island.

He eyed Dick Dart viciously as the latter sat in the bow.

"If some fatal accident don't happen to you before we get back to the cutter, it won't be my fault," he muttered. "Give way, my lads! shove her through the water and be darned to her!"

He relapsed into silence, while the pinnace darted up the bay at a lively rate.

Meanwhile Brott had rowed the skiff towards the northwest point of the Great Sedge.

Landing a hundred yards or so to the eastward of the point, he hauled the skiff up on the bank and listened.

Not a sound was heard.

There was no evidence that Nellie Harding was on the Sedge.

He was about to proceed to the point, when he heard a faint cry.

It was the same that Charlie Fisher had heard.

Brott could not exactly make out the direction.

He listened a moment, and the cry was repeated.

It seemed to be two or three hundred yards to the eastward.

Brott hurried in that direction. In his haste he did not pay sufficient attention to the nature of the soil.

He had not gone more than half the distance when the bottom seemed suddenly to fall out.

He had stepped into a bog-hole.

Down he sank, hip-deep, in the soft, black mud.

It was cold as ice at the bottom, and made his teeth chatter.

He was some time working his way out, and the air was not sweetened by his ejaculations.

He went on a few yards further. Then he stopped by the edge of the reeds and listened.

He heard a sound, but it was not in the direction he expected.

The sound of footsteps was heard hurrying across the sedge from the southeast.

Brott crouched down by the edge of the reeds and listened.

The approaching person came directly to

the spot, paused a few feet off, and listened. Brott, partially hidden by the reeds, could not be seen.

But the form of the other was outlined against the sky, and could be distinctly perceived.

Brott gave a start as he recognized the features.

"It's Charlie Fisher," he muttered, under his breath. "How came he on the Sedge, when I supposed he was in irons in the hold of the cutter? There's some mystery here."

"He must be put out of the way. If he comes across Nellie Harding all is lost."

Brott drew a pistol from his belt.

He did not dare to fire it, for fear other persons might be on the Sedge, and the report would alarm and bring them to the spot.

But it might be used as a club. He would knock Charlie on the head.

No sooner was the resolution formed than it was put in execution.

Taking the pistol by the barrel, he noiselessly arose, and brought it down on the head of Charlie, who was bent forward in a listening attitude.

He fell with a groan.

"That settles you!" muttered Brott, with a low and triumphant laugh. "And now to dispose of the body."

Lifting Charlie in his arms he carried him back to the bog-hole into which he had fallen.

Throwing him in, he pushed him down with his foot until his body disappeared.

"Dead men tell no tales," he muttered. "You are a deserter, and no one will have any suspicion of foul play. So perish all who undertake to interfere with my plans."

With a low, taunting laugh, the brutal, cowardly bully, who would not for an instant have dared to stand before Charlie Fisher in a fair fight, turned away and resumed his search for Nellie Harding.

He retraced his steps toward the spot whence he had heard the cry proceed.

When he thought he had gone a sufficient distance he stopped and uttered a low call.

"Nellie—Nellie Harding!"

"Here—oh, here!"

"In the reeds?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Come out this way—don't be alarmed—it's I, Dick Dart."

It will be remembered that Brott had from the first deceived the girl, and she supposed his name to be Dick Dart.

In a moment a crashing of the reeds was heard as she worked her way through them.

In an instant more she appeared.

She rushed to Brott's side.

"Oh, why have you left me here so long?" she gasped. "I have been almost frightened to death."

"I'm sorry, Miss Nellie," returned Brott, hypocritically, "but an attack on the cutter by the smugglers was every instant apprehended, and neither the lieutenant nor myself dared leave. But you're all right now, and we will go if you are ready."

"Ready? Of course I am, and only too glad to leave this terrible place."

"Come on, then," said Brott, "we'll be off in a jiffy."

Going along the edge of the Sedge, he found the skiff where he had left it.

Assisting Nellie on board, he entered, and seizing the oars, rowed rapidly across the bay.

On the west shore, a stream called Forked river puts into the bay.

Entering the stream, Brott rowed up against the current until they entered a dense cedar swamp.

It was crooked and tortuous, and in some places so narrow that the oars almost touched the banks.

It was dark and gloomy, and objects could not be distinguished twenty feet ahead.

But Brott appeared to know the ground well.

It seemed that he had been there before, for he proceeded straight ahead without hesitation.

Nellie shuddered as the place became darker and darker.

"Are you sure you are going right?" she asked. "This is a terrible place through which we are passing."

"It's all right," said Brott, easily; "I've hunted quail and rabbits through these swamps dozens of times before. I know every inch of ground. You can't lose me."

Nellie said no more. But it was evident that she was very uneasy.

At length they came to a landing-place.

"Here we are at last," said Brott. "Now, Miss Nellie, we'll leave the boat if you please."

He assisted her out and fastened the skiff.

"We'll have to walk through the swamp by a path I know of to the solid land," he said.

Taking her hand he led her through the swamp.

Suddenly he left the direct path and turned into a very narrow one that branched off toward the east.

For two or three hundred yards he followed this until a light was observed glimmering ahead.

"Here we are," he said. "This is the house where the messenger was to meet you. You stay right here while I go and see if he is there. Be very careful not to move a step until I come back, for there is a perfect bog-hole all around us, and if you step off the solid land you will immediately sink out of sight in the mud."

He went to the door of the house and knocked.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN due time the pinnacle reached the meadow about a mile and a half below Sheepshead Point.

Skirting the bank, they reached Goodluck Point, where the southerly shore of Toms River joins Barnegat Bay.

Striking across the mouth of the river in a northerly direction, they reached Coates' Point after a row of two miles more.

This was the spot at which, according to Bill Binks' instruction, they must turn east.

Pulling in an easterly direction across the bay, they had the good fortune to strike the thoroughfare.

They had only rowed a short distance through it when they heard a hail.

"Ahoy—ah—o—o—oy!"

It was Binks, who was on the little island.

They rowed up until the bow of the pinnacle grounded, when Binks waded out and came on board.

"Yer a little late," he growled, stowing his bandy legs in the stern-sheets beside the lieutenant. "It's well nigh onto one o'clock in the mornin', or I'm mistaken."

"It took us longer to row up than we expected," said the lieutenant. "The route you mapped out for us to row is a regular black snake's course."

"It was the safest. A good pilot would have come nearly straight up the bay, inside the flats, by Phillip's channel and the like. But you'd a run aground twenty times if you'd tried it. The only way for greenies to find the Pelican thoroughfare in the dark is to take the bearing from Coates' Point. How many men have you got, cap'n?"

"Nine, beside myself."

"Then there's ten of ye—'leven, countin' me. That's enough. By geebaw! how we'll wipe them smugglers out."

Taking the tiller, Binks steered the boat through the thoroughfare into the deep water beyond.

A row of ten minutes brought them to the beach.

"Don't let yer oars make a sound when ye take 'em in," whispered Binks. "The least sound will alarm the smugglers."

As still as death they unshipped their oars, and hauled the pinnacle a little way up on the shore.

"Where's the house?" whispered the lieutenant.

"A hundred yards or so up from the landing," returned Binks, in the same cautious whisper, "They're all gone to bed, for there's no light showing."

"Get your weapons ready, men," said the lieutenant. "We'll surprise the rascals and capture 'em all without striking a blow."

"Come on," croaked Binks.

As still as death they crept up from the landing toward the house.

In a moment the outlines of a small frame building loomed up.

"Here we are," whispered Binks. "I've got a key—I'll unlock the door, and we'll capture the rascals in their beds."

Inserting the key in the lock he pushed open the door.

"Come on," he whispered. "For your lives don't make a sound."

The whole party entered noiselessly.

"They sleep up-stairs," whispered Binks. "Be as still as mice, and I will lead the way."

He opened the chamber door.

Up they crept stealthily.

"Have your pistols ready while I strike a match," whispered Binks. "The instant the light's made, cover 'em with your pistols."

Click—click!

The pistols were ready cocked for any emergency.

Snap!

The match flamed. The room was a blaze of light. They gazed eagerly around.

They saw—nothing.

The room was empty. So was the house. The prey, if it had been there, had flown.

The lieutenant had turned upon Binks.

"You have deceived us," he said, angrily.

"I haven't," said Binks, sullenly. "They've gone out for something, I suppose. Let's wait—they'll soon be back."

He led the way down-stairs and lighted a tallow candle that stood on a rough pine table.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Dick Dart, suspiciously. "You're making a very good mark of us for the smugglers if they happen to return suddenly."

He instantly extinguished the candle.

"I'll take a cruise around and see if I can find out what the rascals are up to," croaked Binks.

He went out, closing the door after him.

The men stood still in the darkness.

"Lieutenant, I don't like that fellow's actions," said Dick.

"Nonsense," said the lieutenant, who would on no account agree to anything Dick could say. "What do you dislike in him?"

"All his actions."

"You think he is playing us false?"

"I do."

"Well, if we wait, we'll see."

And they did see, in a hurry.

The lieutenant had hardly finished his sentence when the quick rush of a large body of men was heard.

Instantly a rough voice called out:

"Surrender, you government dogs!"

The clicking of musket locks was heard.

The sound proceeded from every door and every window.

The house was completely surrounded.

"There's twenty-five of us," continued the voice; "you can't escape. We're well armed, and have got you well covered with our rifles. Make a single effort to escape and we'll shoot every mother's son of you dead. Do you surrender?"

In the presence of real danger the lieutenant was as great a coward as Brott.

His teeth chattered with fear.

"Speak, or we fire," continued the person outside in threatening tones. "Do you surrender?"

"Yes!" shrieked the lieutenant.

"No!" exclaimed Dick Dart.

"Make ready!" hoarsely cried the voice outside. "We'll teach the government dogs to break into honest people's houses. Fire into the hounds and be darned to 'em!"

"Hold—hold!" shrieked the lieutenant.

"We surrender, I tell you. Don't murder us in cold blood. Ground your arms, men."

"Coward!" said Dick Dart.

"Obey orders!" roared the lieutenant.

"D'ye want us all to be shot down here in the dark? D'ye mean to mutiny?"

"I've never heard it called mutiny to escape when you're in danger of capture," said Dick hotly. "Mutiny or not, I'm going to cut my way through those smugglers. Come on, all you who dare to follow!"

"Ay, ay! we'll follow," cried one and all the crew. "Lead on, sir. We're after ye to the death!"

"Hurrah! Come on, and down with every smuggler who tries to stop you!"

Dick sprang toward the door.

He threw it open and rushed out, followed by the men.

The lieutenant was in the midst of them for he did not dare remain behind.

In an instant they were in the midst of the smugglers.

"Have at the dogs!" shouted Dick. "Cut your way through them, my brave boys!"

A determined rush and the thing was done. Singularly enough not a shot was fired by the smugglers.

They seemed to be taken entirely by surprise by the suddenness of the maneuver.

Through them rushed the cutter's men, few blows that did no particular damage be-

ing exchanged on either side, and ran toward the landing.

Some one was there before them.

It was one of the smugglers evidently, and he was trying to steal the boat and cut off their retreat, for he was making frantic endeavors to shove off the pinnace.

"Stop that, you rascal!" shouted Dick.

He fired his pistol.

The man let go his hold of the gunwale and took to his heels.

It looked surprisingly like Bill Binks.

But no one could positively identify him in the darkness, for they had only a glimpse of him as he disappeared in the gloom.

Pell-mell the men tumbled into the boat, the lieutenant being in the midst.

They had not gone ten yards from the landing when the smugglers, who had by this time recovered from the stupor into which Dick's sudden dash seemed to have thrown them, came rushing to the shore.

"After them!" cried he who seemed to be the commander. "Don't let them escape! Take them alive."

There was a large, flat-bottomed boat with a sharp bow, built for shallow water, on the shore.

To shove it into the bay was the work of a moment.

Four brawny smugglers, whose muscles were hard as iron, caught up the oars and the chase began.

Had the course of the pinnace been directed to the southwest they would have escaped with little difficulty, for they would have had deep water until they rounded the southerly point of the Pelican and struck into the open bay.

The flat boat not being built especially for speed, but for shoal-water work, where a light draught was required, in order to carry well and cross the flats at all hours, would have been distanced by the pinnace, which was constructed on the most scientific principles.

But her bottom was sharp, and with ten men aboard, it required at least fifteen inches to float her.

The lieutenant cowered in the stern-sheets, nearly frightened to death, like the coward that he was.

Dick seized the tiller.

"Give way, men!" he exclaimed. "The rascals are too many for us in a fair fight, but we can outrow 'em."

Between the beach and the Pelican Island, between which and the Middle Sedge the thoroughfare ran, was a stretch of several hundred yards of deep water.

Across this, and heading for the thoroughfare, Dick unfortunately steered, for he knew nothing of the deep water passage around the southerly shore of the Pelican.

His ignorance was destined to get him into trouble.

The pinnace went through the water almost two feet to the flat-boat's one.

When they entered the thoroughfare the smugglers were out of sight, although their shouts and the sound of their oars could still be distinctly heard.

The pinnace cut through the water, distancing the flat-boat, until they were half way through the thoroughfare, when it met with a sudden check.

The tide had commenced falling. There was no longer water enough to float the pinnace.

For a few strokes she dragged heavily through the water, and then ran hard aground.

"Give way, boys!" cried Dick. "Perhaps it's a bar, and we'll drag over."

It was a useless exertion of strength. It only succeeded in forcing the pinnace harder aground at every stroke.

Had they struck the deepest water in the thoroughfare they would have floated, but as it was there was no hope.

Every instant the flat-boat in pursuit now lessened the distance between them.

"Overboard!" cried Dick. "We must wade her through."

Overboard dashed the crew and tugged at the pinnace.

The smugglers appeared through the gloom.

"By Heaven! they're stuck!" cried the leader. "At them now! Now we have them on the hip!"

The lieutenant had no idea of exposing his precious body to a shot.

He crouched down low in the bottom of the boat.

"Coward!" muttered Dick Dart.

The lieutenant made no answer. He controlled himself with a low growl.

But even in the extremity of his terror he swore a swift and deadly vengeance on Dick Dart.

The crew rushed along over the flat with the pinnace with a will.

The flat-boat gained a little, but not much. The water was so shallow, that, although the flat-boat floated without lightening, the oars would not take deep enough hold of the water to make swift headway.

Suddenly Dick caught hold of the gunwale and lifted upward.

His object was to careen the pinnace so far that the lieutenant would tumble out.

He succeeded to a charm.

The lieutenant fell sprawling into the water of the thoroughfare.

It was not deep enough to give him much of a ducking, but he fell face forward, and got his mouth full of sand and mud from the bottom.

He arose, blowing sand and salt water from his mouth like a porpoise, and rushed for the pinnace.

By great exertion he succeeded in catching up.

Grasping the stern, he held on like grim death.

The smugglers were now within easy pistol shot, and a volley from them must have done fearful execution among the crowded crew of the pinnace.

But strange to say they did not fire.

By this time the pinnace had nearly passed through the thoroughfare, and the water was deepening.

The lieutenant began to think that as fortune had favored him thus far, they might, after all, escape.

With this thought came renewed courage.

He suddenly found his voice.

"Give way, my lads!" he exclaimed. "We'll give the rascals the slip yet!"

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Dick Dart. "Glad you've found your voice, lieutenant."

The sound of Dick's voice, and the manner in which he spoke, aroused the fury of a demon in the lieutenant's breast.

A fearful thought entered his mind.

He was the furthest astern, and Dick was next him.

What was easier in the confusion than to shoot Dick dead and swear it was a ball from the smugglers?

All that was needed was a little noise to partially deaden the sounds of the shot.

"Three cheers, my lads!" he exclaimed. "A tiger for the government, and a groan for the smugglers!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Tiger!"

Crack!

While the cheers were being given, the lieutenant had drawn his pistol.

It was loaded with copper cartridges, and his bath had not wet the charge.

Placing it close to Dick's head, he fired.

Without a groan, Dick fell face downward. The waters of the thoroughfare closed over him.

"Shot through the brain," muttered the lieutenant to himself with a feeling of vindictive joy.

The faces of the crew were all turned the other way.

No one had seen Dick fall.

"The smugglers have commenced firing!" cried the lieutenant. "The water's deep enough to float us now. Jump on board, take your places, and pull like the very devil!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WE must return to Brott, whom we left knocking at the door of the cabin in Forked River swamp, while Nellie Harding stood waiting a short distance from him.

The door was soon opened by an old hag.

She appeared to recognize Brott, for she gave a quick start of surprise and seemed about to speak.

But Brott made a negative motion with his lips, and going in, quickly shut the door.

He stood in the presence of a woman past middle age.

Her figure was spare and bony.

Her gray hair was thin and floated unconfinely about her shoulders.

Her mouth was toothless, with the exception of a few blackened crags, which showed horribly when she laughed.

The room was simply a den and nothing more.

The floor was so dirty that it looked as if it had not been swept for weeks.

Only a single window lighted it, and that consisted of but two small panes of glass.

The ceiling was covered with cobwebs, in which lurked the horrible black swamp spiders.

Into the filthy place Brott strode.

The old woman's thin lips parted into a horrible smile. She approached and put a hand on each shoulder, and fawned upon him.

"My gallant son! My noble boy! You've come back to see the old mother once again," she croaked.

"Yes, and I've brought company, mother."

"Bring them in—bring them right in—there's enough for all—and to spare, my noble."

"It's a young lady, mother."

"Eh! A young lady? I hope she's rich, Brott, if you've been getting married. Yes—yes, she's rich, I know, for my son thinks too much of money to marry poor trash—and you could have your pick among the rich ones, I know."

"Nonsense! she's not my wife, mother, although I hope soon to make her so. And she's rich enough to satisfy even your craving after gold."

In a few words Brott described the situation of affairs.

"She is to be kept a close prisoner here, mother, until she becomes my wife," he concluded.

"Yes—yes, my son," croaked the old woman. "I'll keep her."

"And she must not know that you're my mother."

"No—no, I'll keep the secret. Trust me, my son."

"Yes, you can be trusted to keep a secret when it's to your interest to do so," said the dutiful and affectionate son. "You had better call yourself Mrs. Steady."

The old woman rubbed her skinny hands together.

"Steady by name—steady by nature," she croaked, chuckling horridly. "Yes—yes, I'm Mrs. Steady. Call her in, my gallant son, call in your bride that is to be."

"Mind you play your part well," said Brott, as he went to the door, opened it and passed out.

"You must excuse me for remaining so long absent," he said, as he stood by Nellie's side. "The truth is that Mrs. Steady wanted to make her place a little more presentable." He led her into the house.

A dim rush light burned upon the table, and by the faint view of the room which it afforded, Nellie thought the old woman's endeavor to make the place presentable had not proved a decided success.

The old woman commenced bowing and scraping.

"This is Mrs. Steady," said Brott.

"Glad to see you, deary," croaked the hag. "Dear—dear—dear! it's a horrid place to bring such as you to, but I'll try to make you comfortable while you stay."

"I—I don't see the man who was to come for me—who was to wait for me here," said Nellie, after she had glanced around the room.

"No," said Brott. "The fact is, he thought as it was so late that you were not coming, and so he drove back to the town."

"Yes, deary, that's it," said the old woman. "A nice man is the man who came for you, and quite the gentleman, too, if he is the coachman."

"He wasn't the coachman, Mrs. Steady," said Brott, giving the hag a warning look. "The coachman remained on the outside of the swamp with the horses. The gentleman who came to your house was the friend whom Gregory Dart, my father, sent for Miss Nellie, and not the coachman at all."

"No more he wasn't," croaked the crone. "What a treacherous memory I've got, to be sure. But I'm getting old, deary—old and lorn and worn, and that accounts for it. But it's all the same—he's gone and won't be back till morning."

"Oh, deary!" exclaimed Nellie. "What are we to do?"

"Stop here till morning, deary," said the hag. "I'll give you a nice bed made of the soft feathers of wild geese. It's as soft as down, deary—will you stay with old Mother Steady this one night?"

Nellie shuddered at the thought of remaining in the vile place.

"It's really the best thing you can do," said Brott.

"No—no! I really cannot stay here. Can't we go to the town where the gentleman is who came for me?"

"I might go, but you can't," said Brott. "The swamp is very wide, and I don't exactly know the path to the uplands. I'll tell you what I'll do, though. I'll go alone to the village and find the man and have the coachman drive to the edge of the swamp."

"I'll bring with me a guide who knows all the ins and outs of the swamp, and he can pilot you through safely. Good-bye for an hour or two, and make yourself as comfortable as possible until I get back."

Not heeding Nellie's protest that he must not take so much trouble on her account, he walked to the door.

"Sit down, deary," croaked the hag. "Sit down and make yourself comfortable while I show the gentleman out."

She hobbled to the door and stepped outside with Brott.

"I leave her in your charge, old woman," he whispered. "Don't let her escape, or I'll never come to see you again as long as I live."

"I'm very strong," croaked the old crone. "Very strong am I, though I don't look it. If she attempts to escape I'll beat her so that she'll never try it but the once. When will you be here again?"

"To-morrow night. Good-night, mother."

"Good-night, my gallant son. Oh, what an honor you are to your aged parent! You've got blue blood in your veins, and it shows in your every action—your every—"

Brott waited to hear no more, but plunged into the swamp, into the direction of the skiff.

At this instant a marine came up the companion way.

He was very much excited.

"Fisher has escaped!" he exclaimed.

"Hades and fury!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir. He isn't on the cutter."

"Then he must be either on the Great Sedge or on the beach. Let a party of three go to each place. D'ye hear? Get you gone, and you shall have forty lashes with the cat for every hour he's away."

Three men sprang into the gig, three more into the skiff, and pulled away to their respective destinations.

Just then Brott came out of the cabin.

"What's the row?" he asked.

The lieutenant explained.

"Never trouble yourself about Fisher," said Brott, mysteriously. "He'll interfere with our plans no more. If I'm not mistaken, he's lying face downward in a mud-hole in the Great Sedge."

He spoke in so low a tone that Ben Bowline and Kitt Cutlash, who were standing near, could not hear.

At this juncture Jennie Harding came from the cabin.

"Mornin', mum," said old Ben, pulling his hair.

"Good-morning. Where is Mr. Dart?"

Ben's face grew pale.

"Ask him?" he muttered, pointing to the lieutenant. "He knows more about it than anybody else, I allow."

"I am sorry to say, Miss Jennie," said the lieutenant, "that Mr. Dart was killed last night."

"Oh, my God!"

The girl put her hands to her temples and looked around wildly. She tottered to Ben Bowline's side.

"It isn't true!" she shrieked. "Oh, tell me it isn't true?"

Old Ben drew her to him with a tenderness that was not to be expected from a rough tar like him. His voice quivered as he said:

"The best officer that ever lived is lying dead at the bottom of the Pelican thoroughfare."

"Oh, God help me!"

She uttered one shriek and then sank senseless in Ben Bowline's arms.

Without asking leave to enter the cabin, he carried her down to her state-room.

It would have been dangerous for any one to try to stop him. The lieutenant and Brott saw that by the flash of his eyes, and neither attempted to prevent him.

Ben placed her in her berth, and then came up to the lieutenant who still sat on the lazy-board.

He immediately asked leave to go on shore.

"Me and Kitt Cutlash would like to walk up the beach to the thoroughfare and search for Mr. Dart's body," he said.

"Go to the devil if you choose," said the lieutenant, crustily.

"Can we row ashore in the surf-boat, sir?"

"No. If you go ashore you'll swim."

"Then swim it is. Come along, Bones."

"All right," said Kitt. "Overboard we goes!"

Suiting the action to the word he sprang over the side into the bay.

Both struck out for the shore.

"Curse them both for a pair of hounds!" groaned the lieutenant. "I believe they'd as soon mutiny and shoot me dead as look at me. Come up close to me, Brott, I've a plan by which we can make a full million instead of half."

And the two villains commenced in a low whisper to weave a second plot.

CHAPTER XVI.

It is time we returned to Charlie Fisher, whom we left at the moment when Brott pushed him down into the water and mud and ooze of the pond-pole in the Great Sedge.

He was not, as Brott supposed, dead.

The blow of the pistol stock had not been hard enough to break his skull.

It stunned him for the time being only.

Had Brott turned to look back he would have seen that a small portion of Charlie's face remained above the water.

This saved his life.

For hours he lay in the same state of insensibility. Then little by little he recovered.

At last his senses so far returned that he realized his position.

Creeping out of the hole, he staggered a few feet upon the meadow and fell prostrate.

As the day broke and sun arose, its warmth reanimated him. He staggered to his feet and gazed around.

On all sides was the meadow of Great Sedge, surrounded by its dense fringing of reeds.

Towards the beach, to the eastward, the tall masts of the cutter could be seen.

The sight of these alarmed him.

Suppose a boat should be sent to the Sedge—if he remained on the open meadow he would inevitably be seen and captured, and hanged at the yard-arm as a deserter.

He must hide himself away until night, when he would make an attempt to leave the Sedge and escape to the main.

Skirting the edge of the reeds, he kept on until he reached the western side of the Sedge.

Making his way through the reeds, he looked across the bay toward the mainland.

The sight discouraged him. The distance across the bay seemed to be several miles. Could he swim so far?

But a longer examination caused the situation to assume a different aspect.

A mile or so out into the bay was a long line, whose peculiar appearance told that it was a flat of shallow water.

It seemed to reach well over toward the mainland.

If he could reach that, he could wade to the channel on the other side and swim to the point which he could see jutting out into the bay.

He determined to make the effort as soon as it became so dark that he could not be seen from the cutter.

If he failed, it was only a matter of drowning after all, which was not a very painful death, so it is said, and at any rate it was better than starving on the Sedge, or being captured and taken to the cutter.

Having determined upon his plan of action, Charlie again entered the line of reeds and peered through across the meadow.

It was well for him that he did not expose himself.

The crew of the skiff had just landed in search of him and appeared on the meadow on the eastern side of the Sedge.

They came straight across the meadow.

Charlie crouched down low among the reeds. Approaching within a hundred yards or so, they halted.

"He ain't here, that's certain," said one. "Let's sit down here, boys, and take a bite o' backy and have a drink."

The speaker had smuggled a bottle of whisky out of the cutter, and they proceeded to make away with it.

Sitting down on the meadow, they drank to their heart's content.

Consequently they soon became "Half seas over," and as the liquor got into their heads their conversation became very animated.

All this time Charlie lay at full length among the reeds, not daring to move, for fear the crashing of the stalks would betray him.

Suddenly his throat was grasped by a hard and sinewy hand.

"Hush!" whispered a voice. "Not a word, or you die!"

A knife in the hand of the speaker was held at his throat.

"The ropes! Quick!" whispered the man.

Looking up, Charlie saw that there were three of the fellows.

Before he could hardly realize what was happening he was tightly bound and gagged.

The men paid no further attention to him.

Like snakes they wormed their way through the reeds.

At the edge of the reeds they halted, arose stealthily to their feet and brought their muskets to their shoulders.

"Surrender!" said one.

The crew of the skiff staggered to their feet. Their muskets were several yards off in the grass.

"Stand!" exclaimed the smuggler. "Make a movement and you're dead men. We have you well covered, and we never miss our aim."

"Who the devil are you, anyhow?" demanded the ship's carpenter.

"The smugglers that you're hunting down. There's twenty more of us within call. Do you surrender?"

"We can't do anything else."

"That's sensible. Bob, go out and tie 'em, while we keep 'em covered with our rifles."

This was soon done, and they were tightly gagged.

Then they were all carried to a mud-hole three or four hundred yards out into the meadow.

They were thrust down feet foremost to the bottom of the mud, which was about hip deep.

"You're anchored for one while, my hearties," chuckled one of the smugglers.

"Now, fellows, we'll go for the other one."

With a laugh of derision the smugglers left them.

The men presented a comical sight, with only their bodies showing above the mud, unable to move, and their mouths distended by the powerful gags.

The smugglers returned to Charlie.

"Now, my hearty, let's hear about you," said the leader, removing the gag.

Charlie put them in possession of all the facts.

"Deserter, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, you've got pluck. We want just such men as you among us. Will you join us?"

"No."

"All right. Well, you're having a tough enough time of it as it is. We'll not pile it on thicker."

The smuggler drew his knife across the ropes that bound him.

"You're free," he said.

"Thank you."

"Are you hungry?"

"Very."

"Jim, go the boat and get him something to eat."

Charlie devoured the food with a relish.

"I don't think there's much danger of you pulling those fellows out of the mud," said the smuggler. "You'll hardly do that and have 'em capture you for your pains. So we'll not tie you. Come along, fellows."

Leaving Charlie some bread, meat and a bottle of water, they prepared to go.

"Much obliged," observed Charlie. "You smugglers are not half such bad fellows, after all."

"No, we only want to be let alone. Come on, fellows. Young fellow, if ever you'd like to become a smuggler, go to the lighthouse and ask for Hiram Horner, who can play the best game of seven-up of any man on the Jersey coast. Good-bye and good luck to you."

The smugglers entered their boat and pulled away for a low sandy flat called the Clam island.

Late that afternoon the jolly-boat pulled over to the Sedge from the cutter in search of the missing men.

Landing on the east shore, they left a couple

of men in charge of the boat, and the rest pushed across the Sedge.

They were not long in finding the three sailors.

Unbinding them and pulling them out of the mud, they heard their story.

"Those fellows have got the impudence of the devil," was the verdict. "You say you heard one of 'em say 'let's go for the other one?'"

"Sartain."

"That other must be Charlie Fisher, for the men who went ashore on the beach could get no trace of him. You three mud roosters get in the skiff and take her back to the cutter. Mr. Brott wants to use her after sundown. We'll beat the reeds for Fisher, and capture him if he's on the Sedge."

From his hiding-place in the reeds Charlie saw the party divide and commence beating the reeds in different directions, one party going toward the south and the other to the north.

He would be taken between two fires.

He managed to keep out of their way until dark, when he saw that it could be done no longer.

They were about meeting from opposite directions, closing him like a wedge between them.

The supreme moment was come.

He must leave the Sedge.

Crouching low down, he ran noiselessly to the water's edge and waded out into the bay. Soon the water was up to his arm-pits.

Observing the direction of the north star, he commenced swimming toward the west.

On—he he swam, sounding occasionally to see if he had reached the flat, and then striking out again with the same steady, ceaseless stroke.

Suddenly the sound of oars broke upon his ears.

He ceased his stroke and listened.

At that moment he was seized with cramps.

Terrible pains ran through his limbs. His legs were distorted and drawn up underneath his body.

He felt himself sinking. He could not remain above water a minute longer.

The approaching boat was within hailing distance.

"Help—help!" he shouted. "I'm drowning!"

The boat came rapidly alongside of him.

He caught hold of the side. The occupant of the boat leaned over and looked down upon him.

It was Brott, who was rowing across the bay on his visit to Nellie Harding.

"Hah!" he exclaimed, in his astonishment. "Charlie Fisher, is it you? I thought you were dead on the Great Sedge."

"No—no! I did not die. Help me on board, for Heaven's sake!"

"Ha—ha! I'll help you. Yes, to die!"

Charlie struggled to get into the boat.

"Back!" cried Brott. "Back, you dog, and drown!"

Raising his oar he struck a heavy blow on Charlie's fingers.

With a cry of agony he let go his hold and sank.

For a brief period we must visit the cabin in the swamp and see how it fares with Nellie Harding.

After Brott went away and the old hag returned, the latter took a seat on the opposite side of the stove and commenced to entertain her guest with conversation, of which the subject was Brott.

She did her best to instill into Nellie's mind the beauty and perfection of both his person and character.

"He's so handsome, deary," she croaked, leering her bleared eyes at Nellie. "And he's good, too, the best man that ever lived."

"Say, why don't ye marry him, deary?"

"I'm not thinking of marrying any one, madame."

"But you ought to, deary," croaked the hag. "You're old enough, and ye want somebody to take care of ye. And he that brought ye here is a nice man, deary, as nice a man as lives."

In vain Nellie protested that she was not thinking of marrying at all—the old woman would have it that she must, and at last she worked herself into such a rage that she became furious.

"Don't go agin me," she screamed. "I go crazy sometimes, when people go agin me hard, and I'm afeared it's coming on now."

Her face was purple with rage. She com-

menced gesticulating violently, and her eyes snapped.

Nellie's heart beat fast with fear.

Why had she been left alone with this terrible old woman?

She could stay no longer. She would go, trusting to the mercy of the swamp rather than the fury of the crazy hag.

She arose and walked towards the door.

"Where are you going?" demanded the old woman.

"I am going out."

"You'll do no such thing," shrieked the hag. "Back with ye to your seat!"

Nellie continued on to the door.

"Come back, I tell you!" shrieked the woman.

"Ye'll not? Then you shall die! Ha! ha! I've got one of the fits, and you've brought it on me. I'll pay ye for it, ye jade!"

She caught a pistol from her bosom. Cocking it as quick as a flash, she pointed it at Nellie's heart.

"Ha! ha!" she shrieked, "you drove me crazy with yer contradictions, and I'm going to pay ye for it—for revenge—revenge—revenge!"

CHAPTER XVII.

HAD the flat-boat of the smugglers drawn as much water as the pinnace, it could hardly have avoided fetching up on Dick Dart's body, for it passed directly over the spot where he fell.

Although the smugglers had heard the shot they had not observed the execution it did, for they could not distinguish objects through the darkness, and the lieutenant was between Dick and them.

The first sensation Dick felt was a horrible pain, as though his head had been rent in twain.

He knew that he was under water, but for the life of him he could not make a movement.

For a moment he was paralyzed.

For fully half a minute he was motionless.

Then the sensation partly passed away, and he staggered to his feet.

The pinnace and flat boat were both out of sight, but the sound of oars could still be heard.

Looking around, he saw a low, dark line a few yards to the southward.

Making his way there through the shallow water, he reached a low spot of meadow.

It was Pelican Island.

Going some distance from the shore, he sat down upon the grass.

His head pained him badly.

Putting his hand to the spot, he found that the bullet had plowed its way through the flesh, but had not injured the skull.

Had he been familiar with the locality, he could have crossed the thoroughfare to the Middle Sedge and made his way to the beach by land. Nothing would have been easier then than to have walked down the beach until he came opposite the cutter.

Not being aware of that fact, he concluded to remain on the Pelican all night and look about him by daylight.

His wound now produced a kind of stupor.

Sinking back upon the grass, he fell into a deep sleep which lasted until morning.

The rays of the sun awoke him.

Staggering to his feet, he looked around.

The first object his eyes encountered was a boat, with four men, coming through the thoroughfare.

"Ha! I told you so. Didn't I say I saw a body, from the house, lying on the meadow?"

They were the smugglers.

They rowed ashore in a hurry.

Escape for Dick, except by way of the thoroughfare, was impossible, for that was the only shallow water.

He was on a small island, and could not retreat.

He determined to stand and fight it out.

"Halt!" he exclaimed, as the foremost smuggler came within a few feet. "Halt, or I'll fire!"

But he had men to deal with who were accustomed to close quarters, and to whom the word fear was a stranger.

They paid no attention, but continued advancing.

Taking aim at the leader's head, Dick pulled the trigger.

There was no report. The cartridge was ruined by the water, which had worked through between the lead and copper.

"Ha—ha!" laughed the smuggler, in derision. "Try again, my hearty."

Dick threw the useless pistol at the smuggler with all his strength.

It struck him full in the forehead, knocking him down like an ox.

Drawing his cutlass, he struck out viciously.

But he was too late.

The other three had closed upon him before he could use his sword arm.

He struggled bravely. But it was useless. He was weak still, and they were too much for him.

"Surrender, you government hound!" hissed the man who had him by the throat.

"Never!" cried Dick, defiantly. "I'll die first!"

"Then die!" cried the smuggler, drawing his pistol from his belt. "Ha! you will have it? Then say your prayers, for your time has come."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"HOLD hard!" exclaimed a voice.

The smuggler who held the pistol lowered his hand. The man whom Dick had knocked down with his pistol arose to his feet and came forward.

"One live man is worth half a dozen dead ones," he continued. "We'll get some information from him about the cutter."

"Doubtful," said Dick.

"We'll see. Let him up now."

Dick was lifted upon his feet. A man held each arm. He was hard and fast in the toils.

"How came you here?" asked the smuggler.

"None of your business."

"Sulky, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll find a way to take that out of you, I guess. Bundle him into the boat, men, we'll take him to the house."

Dick was led to the boat and placed amidships, with a man on either side.

The other two smugglers—one in the bow and the other in the stern, pushed through the thoroughfare and paddled across the deep water between the Pelican and the beach.

Dick kept his eyes open for a chance to escape.

When they were within twenty yards of the landing, he made a movement that surprised the smugglers.

With a quick movement he forced his arms free from their grasp, knocked one of them into the bottom of the boat and sprang overboard as quick as a flash.

His spring broadened the flat-boat, too, so that she lay broadside to the beach.

Before she could be brought around again Dick was making the best of his way to shore. He succeeded in reaching the landing.

"Ha—ha!" he laughed, tauntingly. "Catch a weasel asleep!"

"The devil!" roared the smuggler. "After him, men!"

Two strokes brought the flat-boat to the landing.

Leaping ashore, the smugglers commenced the chase at full speed. Three men who had been standing in the door of the house uttered a shout and joined the hue and cry.

Dick ran directly down the beach.

It was his only plan. If he attempted to reach the swamp back of the house, he would be cut off by the smugglers from the house. If he attempted to make for the barberry bushes or the sand-hills, he would be intercepted by the same parties.

His only course lay in running due south along the shore of the bay, and outfooting his pursuers.

In this he might have been successful had it not been for an unforeseen obstacle.

This obstacle was in the shape of two men, who arose from a bunch of tall grass quietly in his path.

Throwing themselves upon him, a terrible struggle ensued.

Dick fought desperately.

But the battle was interrupted and decided by the arrival of the four smugglers from the flat-boat, who came upon the scene at this moment.

Dick saw the folly of further resistance.

"I surrender," he said.

"That's sensible," said the leader of the smugglers. "You're a brave fellow, and to

give the devil his due, I must say you fight very well for a government hound. But a man must learn to know when he's whipped. To the house with him, fellows."

When they reached the house Dick was seated in the middle of the room and the smugglers arranged themselves in a circle around him.

Escape was impossible.

"Now, I want to know how you got on the Pelican," said the leader.

Dick reflected that it could do no harm to the cutter to answer the question. There was no need to anger the smugglers any more than was necessary, and so impair his chances.

He told the story of the shooting.

"That's a straight enough story," said the smuggler. "But in one point you're wrong. You didn't receive that wound from us. It came from your own craft. We saw the flash."

Dick opened his eyes wide. Could it be possible the lieutenant had done the fiendish act?

He did not mention his suspicions to the smugglers.

"Now I want some information," said the leader. "How many men have you got aboard the cutter?"

"Find out."

"You refuse to tell?"

"I do."

"Then we'll torture you."

"Go ahead. You may tear me limb from limb before I'll disclose a single secret relating to the cutter."

"Young fellow," said the smuggler, "you are very brave, and as such are entitled to some respect. But I give you fair warning that unless you answer our questions you shall be put to death in the most horrible manner our ingenuity can devise."

"Sail your course," said Dick. "I'm ready."

"Tie him hand and foot," said the smuggler in a voice of rage. "We won't want to use the information for some hours yet, at least. In the meantime, let him be thrown into the room above for an hour or so to see if he will come to his senses and find out what's good for him. At the end of that time, if he is still obstinate, he dies."

In another moment our hero found himself lying at full length on a low bed in the other room.

It is time we returned to old Ben Bowline and Kitt Cutlash, who, it will be remembered, leaped overboard from the cutter to swim ashore and go in search of Dick Dart.

They swam ashore easily, and retreating to the bushes, sat down to arrange a plan of operations.

It was determined to keep to the cover of the barberry bushes as much as possible, and when open spaces were reached to cross them in a hurry, taking the risk of observation.

They had no doubt that Dick was dead, and their object was merely to recover his body from the crabs and fishes and give it a decent burial.

Keeping a good lookout for danger, they moved through the bushes to the northward.

"St!" whispered Ben, suddenly.

He crouched down low in the bushes.

"What is it?" whispered Kitt.

"Somebody's coming. Listen."

The tramp of feet could be heard as a body of men made their way through the bushes from the opposite direction.

Old Ben parted the bushes cautiously and looked through.

Suddenly his rough features relaxed their set expression, and expanded into a broad smile.

"He—he!" he chuckled. "It's the party that went ashore on the beach to hunt up Charlie Fisher. And they hain't got him, nuther, which is a werry good thing."

"It are," said Kitt. "D'ye think I'd capture him if I ran across him? No, sir-ee."

Kitt slapped his wet breeches by way of emphasis.

Old Ben stepped out and confronted the party.

"What luck, my hearties?" he demanded.

"Werry good," said old Sam Sawyer, who commanded the searching party.

"What! You'm got him?"

"No, sir-ee!" said old Sam, shifting his quid. "And that there's what I calls the best luck in the world. If we found him, we'd have to take him in, I s'pose, which ud be uncommon hard lines to my thinking."

"Right you are, Sam-ee," said Ben. "Have

you got such a thing as a pistol or cutlass you ain't a-using?"

"Desartin'?"

"No, we're in s'arch o' Dick Dart's body. The lieutenant he give us leave, but no weapons or boat."

"Couldn't gi' ye no cutlash, Ben," said Sam. "'Cause why, it'ud be missed as soon as we got back to the cutter. But a pistol apiece ye shall have, by gun!"

The pistols and a limited supply of ammunition were at once furnished.

"So long, Sam-ee," said Ben, moving off. "And much obleeged."

No further obstacle was encountered until they reached the open space in front of John Allen's tavern.

How were they to cross this without being discovered from the house?

"Bones," said old Ben, "that's a settler."

"If I come for to go for to get around that there place without showin' hide nor hair what'll you say?" demanded Kitt.

"That yer smarter'n old Ben Bowline."

Kitt led the way to the edge of the meadow that skirted the bay shore.

Throwing himself down, he commenced creeping through the grass like a snake, followed by Ben.

When the center of the meadow was reached they turned off at right angles.

In this way they wormed themselves through the grass until they were at least two hundred yards above the tavern, when they crept toward the barberry bushes.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Kitt.

"Bones, yer a genius," said old Ben. "But I must say as how one more creep like that ud put more kinks in the spine o' yer back than thar is in the tail o' a chimpanzee."

"Unkink 'em then, old man, and come along."

Kitt now led the way.

They ran into no danger, and saw not a living soul until they arrived opposite the Pelican.

Crouching down low, they ran around the sand hills on the east side of the house and reached the swamp in the rear.

Working their way to the westward through the edge of the swamp, they secured a position that commanded a view of the west windows.

There was one on the lower floor, and a smaller one above, which was a half story.

Peering through the bushes, they watched the house.

Suddenly Kitt uttered a quick cry.

"He ain't dead!" he exclaimed.

"Who?" whispered Ben.

"Dick Dart. It's either him or his ghost a-looking out of the up-stairs window."

Old Ben dashed the bushes aside.

"Reef gaskets an' marlin' spikes!" he muttered. "He's thar, sure enough."

"How does he come for to go for to be a-looking out o' that there winder when he was shot as dead as a red herrin and drowned arterwards?" soliloquized Kitt.

"Never you mind how. That is occupied by the smugglers, and if so be as how that there's his live body, and not his ghost, we must find some way to get him out."

"Sartain," said Kitt. "I don't see nobody a-moving around. Let's sneak up."

Gliding back through the swamp towards the sand hills they reached a point in the rear. Falling flat on their breasts, they crept noiselessly across the open space.

Undiscovered, they reached the rear of the house.

There was a door there, but it did not seem to have been often used.

There was a crevice, caused by a knot having partly fallen out, and to this crevice Kitt put his eye.

He saw something which gave him to understand that he and old Ben were in a position of grave peril.

In the room were at least a dozen smugglers, holding a consultation.

They were all fully armed, and were a fierce enough looking set, who gave the impression that it would be dangerous to be caught playing the spy upon them.

Just as Kitt looked, the consultation appeared to be ended.

"Then we're all agreed that the cutter must be destroyed?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very good. Now we'll go out and take a look around to see if there's any spies about. Then we'll go to the sea and see if we can

signal the sloop. After that we'll come back and attend to the young fellow up-stairs."

Kitt's eyes vanished from the knot-hole as quick as a flash.

"We're goners!" he ejaculated. "If we run we'll get shot before we're half way to the swamp. If we stay here we'll be cotched an' murdered. There's death in the pot both ways."

Before old Ben could make a reply, the hand of a smuggler was placed upon the door-latch.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE blow of the oar upon Charlie Fisher's fingers sent a thrill through his entire frame.

The shock seemed to break the cramps, for as he sank to the bottom he felt it leave him.

He did not dare arise to the surface in the same spot where he went down, for he knew that Brott was watching for him, and would strike again as soon as his head appeared.

Swimming under water a considerable distance, he arose to the surface to breathe.

Nothing but his face appeared above water. But he could see Brott, as he stood up in the skiff and peered around in search of him.

Brott appeared to be satisfied at last. He sat down in the skiff.

"He's dead this time, sure enough," he said, in a loud enough tone for Charlie to hear. "How on earth did he manage to escape when I first knocked his brains out, as I thought, and then shoved his body down under the mud? Some of those fellows have more lives than a cat. But he's finished now—there's no doubt about it. And now I must hurry to the old house in the swamp to see if the old woman has succeeded in keeping Nellie Harding safely."

He took up his oars and rowed away, soon disappearing in the darkness.

No sooner was he out of sight than Charlie proceeded in the same direction.

After swimming half an hour longer, he sounded, and to his joy, touched bottom.

He was on the flat, and the water was no deeper than his shoulders.

It grew shallower as he went on until it was hardly waist deep.

Crossing the flat he struck out again in deep water, and after a swim of an hour longer he struck the meadow at the end of a long point.

Sitting down on the duck-grass he took off his clothes and wrung them, put them on again, and was ready for future operations.

One remark of Brott's had caused him a great deal of anxiety. It was this: "I must hurry to the old house in the swamp to see if the old woman has succeeded in keeping Nellie Harding safely."

What was Nellie Harding doing in an old house in the swamp?

And what swamp was it?

Charlie made up his mind that he would not quit the locality until he could answer both questions.

"Let me but place hands on that villain Brott," he muttered, "and if I don't kill him I'll give him cause to remember me to his dying day."

The opportunity was to come sooner than he imagined.

He had struck the shore at the mouth of Forked river.

Not knowing anything of the locality he concluded to follow the bank of the river until he came to a bridge.

Following the shore almost due west he presently found that he had crossed the meadow and entered upon the borders of the swamp.

The stream became very crooked as he proceeded. It was rough traveling, and the swamp became very dark.

There was one consolation. It would make a secure hiding place until he could find means of escape from the country.

Suddenly he heard the sound of oars.

The stream was so narrow at this point that the boat of the oarsmen would be obliged to come within reach.

A low, muttered curse was heard up the stream.

"What a cursed hole this swamp is!" exclaimed a voice. "I'll have to take in my oars, or they'll be splintered against the roots."

"By Heaven! it's Brott!" muttered Charlie. "Now, Mr. Brott, you and I have, this instant, an account to settle."

* * * * *

How did Nellie Harding fare in the presence of the old hag who seemed bent upon her murder? The glare of her small, ferret eyes was dreadful to behold.

Nellie uttered a shriek of terror.

Why had Mr. Dart—for by that name she still knew the villain Brott—left her to the mercy of this horrible old woman?

Why did he not return and save her?

"Don't murder me!" she gasped. "Oh, in the name of mercy, don't shoot me! What have I done that you should seek my life?"

"You've gone agin me," shrieked the hag. "You've put one of my spells upon me. And you shall die, you jade—you shall die!"

"Spare me! I will do anything you wish."

She crouched down behind a chair and drew it before her as a protection against the bullet.

"Come out!" shrieked the hag. "Come out, I say."

"I dare not! Mercy—mercy!"

"Will you promise to do as I say?"

"Yes—yes! I promise to do anything! Only spare me!"

"All right," growled the old woman. "Now you're talking sensibly. Come out from behind that chair."

Nellie came out and stood trembling.

"Don't go agin me any more," muttered the hag. "It's dangerous. I'm desperate when I'm roused. Now, do you intend to marry Mr. Dart or not?"

"He has never asked me. He has not said a word to me about marriage. I don't suppose he wants me to be his wife."

"Bosh!" hissed the old woman. "You're pretty, ain't you? And you're rich, ain't you? And you've got good blood in your veins, haven't you? Why in the name of sense shouldn't he want you, I'd like to know?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Will you have him if he asks you?"

"I—I—if—"

"I don't want any ifs about it," shrieked the hag, her face again becoming purple. "Will you have him—will you have him—will you have him? Say yes—yes—yes! Speak! or I will send a bullet through your brain."

She raised the pistol.

Faint with terror, Nellie sank down upon a stool.

"Yes—yes!" she cried. "If he asks me."

The hag put the pistol in her bosom.

"Now you're talking sense," she croaked.

"It's for your good, deary. He's a nice man and he'll make a splendid husband—he will, indeed. Now sit you quiet, my dear, and forget that the old aunty has said anything disagreeable to you, and we'll have a cup of tea."

The tea was drank. Nellie dared not refuse to do the bidding of the horrible old creature.

For several hours she sat on the stool waiting for the return of Brott.

The old woman kept her basilisk eyes upon her.

Presently the hag began to nod.

Nellie's heart leaped. Oh, if the wretch would sleep.

Her eyes closed; her head fell forward upon her breast. Her breathing became loud and steady.

Rising as still as death, Nellie made her way toward the door.

She placed her hand upon the latch and lifted it.

The latch clicked.

In an instant the hag was wide awake.

With a cry of rage she sprang forward.

Uttering a shriek of terror, Nellie threw the door open and ran outside.

Her foot slipped on the doorstep and she fell prostrate.

Before she could arise the woman was upon her.

"Ha! ha!" shrieked the hag. "You'd escape, would ye? I'll pay ye for it. I've got another of my mad fits on me. I'll choke ye to death, ye jade!"

Goaded to madness, Nellie struggled desperately.

But she was a child in the hands of the old woman, whose muscles were as hard as iron. Her bony fingers closed around Nellie's neck.

The girl felt that she was choking. She could not breathe.

"Ho! ho!" shrieked the hag; "will ye take advantage of me while I sleep? Ha! ha! I'm Mrs. Steady, and I hold a steady grip."

Nellie felt that she was dying.

But suddenly the grip relaxed. The old woman arose, seized Nellie by the arm and dragged her into the house.

"I'll not kill ye this time," she muttered, "because he that brought ye mightn't like it. But the next time you try to escape you die! D'ye hear? Yedie!"

Trembling with fright, Nellie sank down upon the chair into which the old woman thrust her.

In the morning the hag prepared breakfast, and again, late in the afternoon, what she called dinner.

It was a revolting meal enough, but the woman ordered Nellie to eat and she was obliged to do so.

Some time after dark a knock sounded on the door.

"He's comin'," said the hag, briefly. "This night he'll ask you to be his wife. Mind you say yes, for if you don't I swear I'll murder you!"

The door opened and Brott appeared.

CHAPTER XX.

KITT CUTLASH and old Ben were in a position of great danger.

The instant the door was opened they would be seen and there would be no escape for them.

Fortunately, just as the smuggler lifted the latch, the leader called out:

"Don't go out that way. The hinge is out of order. It's liable to break any time the door is opened."

The latch fell again in its place.

Kitt Cutlash drew a long breath of relief.

Twenty yards back of the house a short strip of fence was standing.

By the fence was a line of tall grass and weeds.

Springing across the open space, Kitt threw himself down in the grass followed by Ben.

Hardly had they done so when the smugglers emerged from the front door.

Part of them passed to the rear of the house, and looked carefully around in all directions.

Perceiving nothing unusual, they returned to the front, and the whole party, with the exception of one man, who was left to guard the house, walked across the beach to the sea.

No sooner had they disappeared than Kitt dragged his lank body out of the grass, and crept towards the house, followed by Ben Bowline.

Reaching a position directly underneath the window, he cautiously arose and peered through.

Only one person, the smuggler who had been left on guard, was in the room.

He sat there with his back to the window.

Kitt dropped down by Ben, and communicated the situation of affairs.

It was determined to spring through the front door and surprise and capture him before he could make resistance or give the alarm.

Walking noiselessly around the corner of the house, they suddenly opened the door, sprang upon the man, and had him down before he could hardly realize what was happening.

The hard hand of Ben Bowline was upon his throat.

Kitt knelt beside him with a pistol in his hand.

"If you come for to go for to move or speak," squeaked Kitt, "I'll put a bullet through ye, sartain."

"Gag him, Bones!" said old Ben, holding out a handkerchief with his left hand.

"Open yer mouth, you Sand Spaniard!" said Kitt. "Give us that bit of tarred rigging, Ben."

The smuggler was soon bound and gagged. No time was to be lost, and they hurried up-stairs in search of Dick Dart.

He had managed to roll off the low bed, drag himself to the window, and raise himself to the chair.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed, as soon as he saw them. "Kitt Cutlash and Ben Bowline forever!"

"Ay, ay, my hearty!" returned old Ben. "They're a hard team to beat when they pull together. Which I'm glad, sir, to see you a-looking so pert and hearty arter being shot through the brain and then drowned."

"Likewise so be I," said Kitt, drawing his knife and setting Dick free. "Take a reef in your tongue, Ben Bowline, for them Sand

Spaniards'll be back and shoot us all through the brain and drown us."

They went down-stairs in a hurry.

On the hooks above were several muskets.

Finding some ammunition in a cup-board, they stowed it away in their pockets and started to leave.

They were none too soon.

The smugglers, returning from the sea, were just appearing through the glade.

They uttered a shout as they saw the party.

"Governments, by gad!" exclaimed the leader. "After them! They must not escape!"

"Sand Spaniards, by gum!" roared Kitt. "Away from 'em, fellows! To the swamp!"

Springing from the low porch, they ran around the west side of the house and dashed at full speed toward the swamp to the northward.

The smugglers dashed around the east side of the house and ran in the same direction.

It now became an exciting race for life.

Much depended on which party reached the swamp first.

The fugitives did.

With a rousing cheer they dashed into the thicket.

Kitt led the way, his lank body gliding easily through the bushes, breaking the path for the others.

Suddenly they emerged from the swamp upon a low but solid piece of ground, upon which grew several large trees.

Here the bushes were too open to admit of hiding.

They must cross it. But before they could get to the other side the smugglers would make their appearance at the edge and have a fair shot at them in the open.

They must not risk it.

They had reached the middle when a yell from the smugglers told they were discovered.

"Surrender, you government dogs, or we fire!"

"On—on!" cried Dick.

An answering cry came from the opposite side of the open place, the direction in which they were heading.

Half a dozen men stepped out of the edge of the swamp.

"A chase—a chase!"

"Stop 'em!" roared the pursuing smugglers.

The men advanced on a run.

The three fugitives halted in consternation.

They were between two fires, either of which would be fatal.

"Surrender, you government dogs!" cried the party of smugglers from the north. "There's no chance for you to escape. Surrender, or we'll fire into you!"

"Never!" cried Dick. "Never shall you get me in your clutches again, unless you lay hands on my dead body. Kitt Cutlash, Old Ben Bowline, here we stand and fight and die!"

"Ay—ay!" roared Old Ben, planting his feet firmly in the sod. "Come on, ye bloody thieves, we'll gi' ye a taste o' what men-o-war's-men can do in the fighting line. And afore we knock under some o' ye shall bite the dust."

We must now return to the cutter, on board of which are to transpire some exciting events which are destined to entirely reverse the order of things in that direction.

As night closed in nothing unusual was observed on shore.

But had the cutter's crew been gifted with the faculty of seeing through the darkness, about ten o'clock they would have observed two long and narrow boats filled with men approach the Great Sedge and hug its eastern shore until they arrived at the point nearest the cutter.

Running the boats ashore, the crews landed on the Sedge.

Passing through the reeds, they sat down on the meadow.

The leader was a large, long, muscular fellow.

"Men," said he, in a hoarse voice, "are you all agreed that the cutter must be got rid of?"

"Yes."

"And I am with you. Does any man among you prefer to lead the attacking party?"

"No—no! You are the leader—we follow."

"Very good. Now let's have a consultation as to the best plan to pursue."

The plan agreed upon will appear as the succeeding events are unfolded.

A few minutes after twelve each man proceeded to lash his pistol fast to the top of his head.

Then they seated themselves in their boats and rowed out until they were within a hundred yards of the cutter.

The boats drew together, side by side, and stopped.

"Herring and Miller will remain in the boats," whispered the captain. "When we give you the signal that the cutter's ours, come alongside. Overboard with you, men; you have your orders."

The smugglers dropped noiselessly into the bay and swam towards the cutter, holding their heads high above the water, to prevent wetting their pistols.

In a few minutes the sides of the cutter loomed up in the darkness.

"Steady, men!" whispered the leader; "make for the fore-chains."

Keeping well together, with noiseless stroke, they reached the spot indicated.

"I must master the watch," whispered the captain. "If I can do that without giving the alarm, the cutter's ours. Be still as death until I give the signal. If you hear me fire my pistol, make for the boats for your lives, for you may know I've failed."

Grasping the chains, he climbed up noiselessly as a cat until he reached the bowsprit.

Flattening himself out upon it, he crept like a snake to the deck.

Raising himself cautiously, he peered around.

All was quiet on board the cutter.

Only one man appeared to be on watch, and he was sitting carelessly on the windlass.

His back was toward the bow.

The smuggler reached down and took up a marlinspike that lay on the deck.

"All depends upon the chance of a single moment," he muttered. "If he looks around all fails and the cutter's safe; if not, she's ours."

He crept steadily toward the unsuspecting man.

CHAPTER XXI.

"O, HO! my gallant lad!" croaked the old hag. "So you've come at last to see your lady love. Ha, ha! She's ready to yer hand."

Brott glared at the old woman angrily.

"Shut up!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by such talk?"

"Nothing at all, my gallant lad. It's only the old aunty's talk—she don't mean anything—no, no, nothing at all—"

"If you don't keep quiet I'll pitch you out of the window!" roared Brott. "What d'ye mean? Are you drunk? Say, what d'ye mean?"

He was the only human being whom she feared and loved.

She made no reply, but fawned upon him.

Nellie rushed to Brott's side.

"Take me away from here!" she cried.

"Oh! for Heaven's sake, leave me no longer in the power of this horrible old woman!"

The hag glared angrily at Nellie, as if she could have murdered her on the spot.

Brott contemplated them both in astonishment.

"You she-fiend!" he hissed, turning fiercely upon his mother. "Have you been abusing the girl?"

"No—no, my gallant lad," muttered the crone, fawningly. "I've been very kind to her. I've been as good as good could be."

"She lies!" cried Brott. "I must have an explanation of this. Let me hear your story, Miss Nellie."

Nellie related what had occurred.

"Old woman!" said Brott, "you've behaved like the very devil. What in the name of Satan got into you?"

"She wouldn't promise to marry you, my gallant lad," croaked the hag. "I know you loved her."

"That's true enough. And now that the ice is broken, I may as well continue. Nellie, I love you."

"Ha—ha!" chuckled the hag.

"Be quiet, wretch!" roared Brott. "Nellie, I want you to become my wife."

"That I can never be. And I insist that you take me away from here this instant."

"That I shall never do until you marry me."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the hag. "Now the blue blood shows. That's the talk, my gallant lad."

"What!" exclaimed Nellie, horror-stricken. "Is it your intention to keep me here in the

power of this terrible crazy woman until you force me to marry you?"

"That is just it. And to prove that I am in earnest, I will tell you something else. No one sent for you from New York. It was a plot invented by the lieutenant and myself to get you in our power."

"Oh, Heaven!"

"And in this dismal, unhealthy swamp—so filled with malaria and miasma that few can live here more than a few weeks—here you shall remain until you perish of disease, unless you become my wife. The instant you marry me, I'll take you to New York to my father and your sister, who will be very well pleased with the arrangements."

"Very well, I promise."

Brott was astounded. He had expected resistance. Instead, he found compliance the instant the subject was mentioned. He hardly knew what to make of it.

"Do you really mean it?" he asked.

"Certainly. You need not have taken all this trouble, for I should have promised just the same without that."

"Then you really cared for me all this time?"

"Of course—what girl could help it?"

"Ho, ho, my gallant lad!" chuckled the old hag. "Of course—of course, what girl could help loving my gallant lad?"

"But you must give me three days."

"Three times three, if you wish," said Brott, in high glee.

"Three days will be time enough."

"Very well. At the end of that time the marriage shall be celebrated. Shall I bring a justice of the peace or a minister?"

"Oh, either," said Nellie, carelessly.

"Preachers I don't like," said Brott. "I've got no use for 'em. A justice'll suit me."

"He, he!" chuckled the hag. "Preachers are no good. They're a lazy, good-for-nothing set. I don't like 'em either. You'll do credit to my teachings, my gallant lad."

"Shut up!" roared Brott, shrugging his slouchy hunched-up shoulders. "If you don't keep quiet, you wretch, you'll get put out of here, and hoof it alone through the magnolias. My dear Nellie, I must leave you, but I shall certainly return by to-morrow night."

"Do," said Nellie.

Brott then took his departure in high spirits.

Under the pressure of circumstances, Nellie had promised to become his wife.

Did she mean to keep the promise? We shall see.

We left Charlie Fisher crouching down in the darkness on the bank of the stream that runs through the swamp, lying in wait for Brott.

In a moment that worthy pushed the skiff so near that Charlie could have stepped on board.

As the skiff passed, he suddenly leaned forward, caught Brott by the throat, and dragged him out of the skiff.

Throwing him on the bank, he held him down with a grip of iron.

"My God! who are you?" asked Brott, in a voice that shook and trembled with fear.

"I'm Charlie Fisher, you scoundrel, whom you twice tried to murder!"

"Just Heaven, have you escaped again?"

"Yes, to punish you for your crimes! Lie still, you villain, while I relieve you of your pistols!"

Not daring to stir, Brott lay quiet.

Charlie removed the pistols from his belt, and searching his pockets, found a small-bladed knife.

He opened the largest blade.

"Good God! don't murder me!" groaned Brott.

"A fine fellow you are to talk about not murdering anybody when you've twice attempted my life. Hold your horses a minute, and you'll see what I'm going to do."

Putting his foot on Brott, Charlie arose and cut a whip from one of the trees.

"Now, Brott," said he, "in return for your fiendish actions, I'm going to give you the very worst licking you ever had. And if you sing out for help, I swear I'll shoot you dead!"

Drawing a pistol, he cocked and pointed it at Brott's heart.

Then he commenced to administer the castigation.

Swish—swish!

Every blow struck the mark, and that mark was Brott's face. Each lash left a long, red mark.

"Oh—oh—oh!" he roared.

"Shut up! Grin and bear it."

"Oh—oh! You're taking my life! For Heaven's sake, let up!"

Charlie delivered one more lash and then he rested.

"Now I want you to answer a question," he said, "and mind you tell the truth. What have you done with Nellie Harding?"

"I put her in charge of the man Dick Dart's father sent for her."

Swish—swish—swish!

Down came the switch three times.

Brott's face was covered with blood.

"Oh—h—h! Oh—o—o! Ic—c—h!" moaned the coward. "My God! let up! You're cutting my face to pieces!"

"I'll cut it off if you don't tell me the truth. Where is Nellie Harding?"

"In the swamp!" screamed Brott.

"What swamp?"

"This. In an old cabin. Good Lord! Don't whip me any more!"

"Brott," asked Charlie, suspending operations. "Do you know you're one of the worst cowards that ever lived?"

"Yes—yes! I'm anything you wish. Only don't whip me any more."

"I don't intend to. I think you have had enough of the swish. I'm now going to use the knife on you!"

"Oh, Lord! Do you intend to murder me?"

"Not quite as bad as that. I'm only going to slit your ears."

Brott caught his breath.

"You don't mean that!" he gasped.

"As sure as you live. You're such a terrible villain that you ought to have a mark on you for people to distinguish you by. The Lord put a mark on Cain's brow for murder, and I'm going to put a mark on your ears for twice attempting to kill me, besides your other crimes. Now, Brott, if you want to save your worthless life, hold still, for just as sure as you commence to kick up a rumpus, I'll put a bullet into your heart, and the knife into your throat instead of your ear."

Brott commenced the most abject appeal.

"Shut up!"

Holding the pistol to Brott's heart, Charlie put his knife to one of Brott's ears and made a long slit entirely through the lobe.

Brott roared like a mad bull.

The same service was instantly performed for the other.

Brott yelled like a hyena.

Charlie arose.

"I want to give you a piece of advice," he said. "Don't cut up any more deviltry. The next time you try it I shall catch you and slit your nose. Now get up, you confounded rascal, and go!"

Brott arose and sprang into the skiff.

Taking up an oar, he pushed like mad until the creek became wide enough to admit of rowing.

Then he bent to the oars, and did not stop his stroke until he rounded up alongside of the cutter.

The men on deck started back in astonishment at Brott's appearance.

It was frightful.

His face was gashed and covered with blood, and that, together with his slit ears, presented a terrible appearance.

"What's the matter, sir?" asked old Sam Sawyer. "Ye look as if you had been washing your face in cranberry sass."

"Cranberries be hanged!" roared Brott, who dared not tell the real cause of his injuries. "It was the cursed smugglers! They've cut me! They've hacked my face all to pieces! They've murdered me!"

He dashed past them with a howl and ran down into the cabin.

"Bilee," said old Sam to his messmate,

"that there's an awful fate to overtake a human critter. But as Providence ordered that there should be a little hackin' done, I can't say as I'm sorry that Brott was the one as caught it."

Charlie Fisher did not long stand still on the bank of the creek after Brott so unceremoniously left him.

"One villain at last has received a small part of his merited punishment," he said. "I am not at all sorry that I served him so, for it was not a tenth part of what he deserved."

"And now how can I find Nellie? I had no business to let Brott go until I made him pilot me to her, but in the excitement of the moment a fellow can't think of everything."

"She must be further up the swamp, for Brott came from that direction."

He groped his way along the edge of the

stream until he had gone nearly half a mile deeper into the swamps.

Then he turned abruptly and plunged into its heart.

In order to understand the success he met with in his search we must return to Nellie Harding.

The old hag and she got on very nicely together after Brott left.

The crone chuckled and grinned and fawned upon Nellie, and seemed to feel unable to do enough for her.

"Now, deary," croaked the old woman after awhile, "we'll go to bed. We got no sleep last night, and we're both tired and sleepy now. We'll sleep together, deary—come along."

Sleep with that horrible, hideous wretch!

The thought was torture, but Nellie pretended to acquiesce with perfect willingness.

"I am very sleepy, Mrs. Steady," she said.

"Come along then, deary."

Taking the tallow candle dip in her hand the hag led the way up the ladder into the apartment above.

It was nothing but a garret with a triangular roof.

Nellie could not stand upright in it.

The bed was the most squalid that could be imagined, and the original color of the blanket could not be distinguished for dirt.

Nellie shuddered at the thought of sleeping there.

The hag commenced disrobing, bidding Nellie follow her example.

After seeing Nellie to bed, the old woman extinguished the light and followed.

Taking the outside of the bed, she drew Nellie closely to her, placing both arms around her and prepared to go to sleep.

In a few minutes she was successful, for she soon commenced snoring loudly.

This was the opportunity Nellie had been waiting for.

She determined to risk everything and make the attempt to escape.

Little by little she disengaged herself from the shriveled arms of the miserable old hag.

The old woman was wrapped in sound slumber.

She never stirred.

Creeping from the foot of the bed, Nellie stood upon the floor, and groped around in the darkness for her clothing.

Dressing herself hastily, she caught up her shoes and crept stealthily towards the ladder.

As she stepped upon the first rung it creaked, giving out a shrill, sharp sound.

Instantly the old woman sat up in bed.

"Ha!" she muttered. "What was that?"

Thump—thump! went Nellie's heart, as she descended the remaining rungs of the ladder.

The hag uttered a shriek of rage, and sprang out of bed.

Nellie dashed across the room to the door, just as she made her appearance at the top of the ladder.

"Oh, Heaven help me now!" cried Nellie, as she worked at the fastenings of the door.

The door flew open.

"Come back—come back, ye jade!" shrieked the hag. "I'll pursue ye! I'll kill ye in the swamp."

With a cry of terror Nellie sprang out and fled away in the darkness.

She had not gone far when she heard the hag in swift pursuit.

Looking back, she perceived that she carried a lantern.

"Ha—ha!" shrieked the hag. "I'll have ye! Oh, how I'll make ye suffer!"

Into the dense swamp plunged Nellie.

On—on she ran.

Miring in at every step, she still kept on, and the vile hag kept up her infernal shrieking in the rear.

Suddenly a man stepped before her.

"By Heaven, I believe it's Nellie Harding!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—yes, save me—oh, save me!"

"So I will!" cried Charlie Fisher.

Stopping not to ask by whom she was pursued, he threw an arm around her and hurried on.

Suddenly the soil became more soft and yielding.

In an instant they both sank down above their knees.

Floundering on, and assisting Nellie, Charlie took another step forward.

Down they sank again, this time nearly to their waists.

Every exertion caused them to sink deeper.

They were in a treacherous quagmire of unknown depth.

"Oh, it is terrible that you should die such a death!" groaned Charlie.

Crash—crash—crash!

Regardless of scratches or bruises, the old hag forced her way through the bushes.

She aimed at the edge of the quagmire and stopped.

She saw them.

Swinging the lantern around her head, she jumped up and down in fiendish glee.

"Ha, ha!" she shrieked. "You're caught in a snap, ye jade! you and yer pretty lover. You'll sink—sink—sink! And the more ye try to get out the deeper down ye'll go. Down—down to the bottom, full sixty feet—full sixty feet! And I'll stay here and see ye sink! I'll stay here and hear ye beg for mercy. I'll stay here and see ye die, ye jade! Not a finger will I lift to pull ye out. And I'll stay here and sing and dance at yer funeral while yer buried alive. Buried alive, ye jade! Ha, ha! ha, ha!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE smuggler raised the marlin spike above the head of the unsuspecting watch.

Crash!

Down it came with resistless force, and the man pitched forward from the windlass upon the deck.

The smuggler eagerly scanned the deck. Not a person was in sight.

Crouching down behind the windlass, he waited a moment to see if the sound of the blow had alarmed the crew.

All remained quiet.

No sound was heard save the slight ripple of the flood tide as it was cut by the bow of the cutter and was swept past on either side.

The smuggler crept to the bowsprit.

He scratched upon it three times with the marlin-spike.

Instantly a slight commotion was observable in the water below.

In a moment more smuggler after smuggler came over the side until they stood on deck to the number of twenty.

"The fore-castle first," whispered the leader.

Each man took down his pistol and removed his knife.

"Make not a sound," whispered the leader. "A misstep ruins all."

Stealthily they passed through the hatchway and descended the ladder into the fore-castle.

In their hammocks, sound asleep, lay the crew of the cutter.

In the absence of Dick Hart, Charlie Fisher, old Ben and Kitt, there were only fifteen on board.

Silently the smugglers glided to the hammocks, one man to each.

Each had in his hand his knife, held to the throat of the sleeper, and his pistol to his breast.

When all was ready the leader placed his hand on the arm of the man who occupied the hammock nearest the hatchway.

He shook him gently. The man awoke.

"Hist!" whispered the smuggler. "Not a word—not a sound—not a movement, or you are a dead man!"

To disobey was certain death.

The sailor submitted and allowed himself to be bound hand and foot.

The same tactics were pursued with each of the others.

"Success!" ejaculated the leader. "The worst part of the job is over. Now ten of you remain here to watch these fellows, while the rest of us go to the cabin and capture the officers."

Leading the way, followed by ten of the men, he entered the cabin and advanced to the first state-room door.

It happened to be the lieutenant's, and it was locked.

Stepping back a few feet the smuggler threw his body against it.

With a loud crash the fastenings gave way and the door flew open.

In rushed the smuggler, followed by two of his men.

The lieutenant, who had been sleeping soundly, started up with a cry of terror.

"Back—back!" exclaimed the smuggler. "Down, you government hound, or die!"

The lieutenant sank back upon his bunk.

"Who are you?" he gasped, quaking with terror. "Who are you, and what do you want here?"

"We're the smugglers whom you've been sent to hunt like dogs," was the fierce reply.

"And we want you!"

"Mercy!" whimpered the lieutenant.

"Bah!" sneered the leader. "What an infernal coward you are. A fine man you for the government to send to guard the Jersey coast, where brave men live."

"I had to come," whined the lieutenant. "I was sent out, and I had to obey orders. Don't make me suffer for what I couldn't help."

"Tie him up," said the smuggler, contemptuously. "If the rest of the officers are such sneaks as this man, I can whip a hundred of the curs myself."

Paying no further attention to the lieutenant, he went out of the state-room and tried the next door.

It was Brott's.

The scoundrel had been awakened by the assault on the lieutenant.

Realizing that either the crew had mutinied, or the cutter had been attacked by the smugglers, he crouched down in a corner, almost frightened to death, not a thought of resistance entering his cowardly mind.

When the smugglers knocked upon his door and demanded admittance, Brott crept tremblingly forward and let them in.

The instant they made their appearance, he fell on his knees and commenced to beg in the most abject manner.

"Spare my life," he howled. "Don't kill me. I love the smugglers—I've always been their friend—I swear I never struck a blow or lifted a hand against them."

"You're worse than the other coward," said the smuggler, contemptuously. "By George! you're the worst I ever saw."

He administered a kick to the wretch that made him howl.

"Oh!" roared Brott. "Good Mr. Smuggler, don't do that any more. I've always loved the smugglers, and I've only been waiting for a chance to join you. I'll join you now, right away."

The smuggler regarded the crying villain with contempt.

"You're a fool, as well as a coward," he exclaimed. "We can get plenty of brave men on the shores of the bay, and don't want such weak-kneed, white-livered fools as you. Get up, you cur!"

Brott arose and stood half bent, in abject submission.

"I've a notion to throw you overboard as food for the sharks. Such a coward as you don't deserve to live."

"Oh, don't—please don't! I ain't fit to die."

"That's so. Tie him up, fellows."

Brott was tied tightly, howling in terror meanwhile and begging for mercy, and thrown on the cabin floor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT this instant Jennie Harding made her appearance at the door of her state-room.

"Ha!" exclaimed the smuggler, in surprise. "Whom have we here?"

"One who was rescued from the wreck of the Hyperion, the fever ship now in quarantine at Norfolk. I suppose you are the smugglers. I am a guest on board the cutter, and I hope I shall be treated as a lady while the cutter is in your hands."

"Certainly. The men of this coast never ill-treat a lady. You will be perfectly safe, and may go ashore as soon as it is consistent with our safety to send you. In the meantime, you may have the liberty of the deck, if you will promise not to make the slightest effort towards releasing the officers or crew of the cutter."

"I can't promise that."

"Then we must confine you to your state-room."

Jennie immediately went inside, and the smugglers closed the door and locked it.

Returning to the fore-castle, the smugglers carried the crew of the cutter one by one into the run and left them.

Returning to the quarter-deck, they consulted as to what was best further to be done.

"Take her outside, over the bar, and scuttle her," said one.

"Set fire to her," said another.

"Put her in the smuggling line."

"Hold!" said the leader. "There's as many different opinions about that as there are men. We'll take time to consider. I'll ask another

question. What's to be done with the officers and crew?"

Before the question could be answered, a head appeared over the bow of the cutter.

The owner of the head gazed aft for a moment and then quickly disappeared.

"By Heaven!" he whispered to some one below him, "we've walked squarely into a trap. The smugglers have captured the cutter. What's to be done?"

* * * * *

"Here we will stand and die!" cried Dick Dart, as the smugglers closed in upon them from the north and south. "Make mincemeat of some of the rascals before we fall, my brave boys!"

"Hurrah!" shouted old Ben. "We can't die at a better time."

"Die be darned!" roared Kitt Cutlash. "Who's a-talkin' o' dyin'? Don't you see there's a swamp to the right? Foller me!"

Perceiving the determined attitude of the fugitives, the smugglers had paused.

Some of them must fall if they forced the fighting at close quarters, and they did not like the idea.

They halted for consultation.

"Come on!" yelled Kitt; "never say die!"

Turning abruptly to the east, he dashed through the trees into the swamp.

Dick and old Ben followed at double quick.

With a yell of rage the smugglers followed. Kitt's maneuver had given the fugitives the advantage in point of distance.

The smugglers were no nearer them than they had been before.

But they were on both sides, and our friends were obliged to run straight ahead.

A few minutes of this would bring them through the narrow swamp, and out upon the sands, where there was no cover.

This must be avoided. They must keep under cover at all hazards.

Right ahead was a thick clump of bushes.

Into this Kitt sprang, followed by the others.

The smugglers were not twenty yards behind.

At Kitt's feet was a large club. Catching it up he flung it with all his force far out into the bushes.

It crashed through the branches when it struck, making a loud noise.

"There they are!" cried the party to the southward. "Run the government dogs down. Chase 'em out upon the sand and we've got 'em!"

Both parties dashed by the bushes and disappeared in full pursuit.

"Hel hel!" chuckled Kitt Cutlash. "Ye'll run us down on the sand, will ye, ye lubberly Sand Spaniards! Ye'll have to stop chasin' a log o' wood first. We must take the back track, fellows. Away with ye."

Away they went on the back track to the westward toward the meadow.

Leaving the swamp they came out upon the open meadow.

Dashing across it, they reached the thoroughfare.

"In with you!" cried Kitt. "We'll hide in the reeds on the Pelican. They'll never think o' looking for us there."

Wading across the thoroughfare, they hid among the reeds in the east shore.

From here they could see the house and the line of the beach to the southward for several miles.

In about an hour they saw the smugglers emerge from the swamp and walk toward the house.

They were gesticulating violently.

"If them smugglers was to come for to go to lay hands on us again, how they'd maul us!" chuckled Kitt.

"Bones, yer right," said Old Ben solemnly. "And I'll swear there's brains in a skelington, arter all."

The smugglers disappeared in the house.

"Keno," said Kitt.

It was determined to make no further movement until some time after nightfall.

But the time was improved by taking the bearings of their surroundings.

From the appearance of the water to the southeast it was concluded that there was a flat in that direction.

To reach it it was only necessary to swim the channel, when they could wade ashore and reach the beach considerably to the southward of the house, when it would only be necessary to walk about eight miles down the beach to reach the cutter.

It was past ten o'clock, as near as old Ben could tell by the position of the stars, before it was thought safe to make the attempt.

Leaving the Pelican, they struck out for the flat, reached it, waded ashore, and struck out down the beach for the cutter.

Reaching the spot where she was anchored, they swam out to her and climbed up the fore chains.

Dick Dart was first.

As soon as he reached the level of the deck and looked off he saw that something was wrong.

A moment's inspection convinced him that the men he saw in a group on the quarter-deck were smugglers.

Dodging down, he communicated the intelligence to Kitt and old Ben.

"We must recapture the cutter," he whispered. "Ben, is the forecastle gun loaded?"

"It was when I left this morning."

"What with?"

"Buckshot and 3 Bs, for a big flock o' black ducks that feed out on the flat off the Big Sedge."

"Will you help to make an effort to retake the cutter?"

"Ay—ay!"

"Then follow me."

Like shadows they crept over the side, and skulked to the windlass.

The smugglers were earnestly engaged in conversation. Apprehending no danger, they had neglected to post a watch.

The forecastle pivot gun, a brass piece with a movable carriage, stood just abaft the windlass.

Dick crept to it.

Feeling for the cap, he found that it was in its place.

Slowly he moved the muzzle of the gun until it pointed directly at the center of the group of smugglers.

Seizing the lanyard, he sprang upright, with Kitt and Old Ben on either side.

Clear and shrill his tones rang out on the night air:

"Surrender, you smuggling dogs!" he cried. "Throw down your arms, or I'll blow you all to atoms!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"DEATH and destruction!" yelled the leader of the smugglers. "We're betrayed?"

"Not betrayed!" shouted Dick Dart; "only surprised. Do you surrender?"

"No. Forward, men, and hurl the government hounds into the bay."

"Halt—stand back—back, I say! Or, by the Eternal, I'll stretch half your number dead upon the deck."

"Upon them!" roared the smuggler.

But the smugglers were not disposed to obey.

They were brave men enough, but no man cares to rush to quick and certain death.

Dick saw that they were cowed.

"The first man that draws a pistol, or makes a motion to come forward, dies!" he cries. "We have the best of you and we're bound to keep it. Ben Bowline and Kitt Cutlash shoot dead the first man that makes a movement."

"Ay—ay!" growled Old Ben. "Blarst 'em! I'm only a waiting for 'em to do it, that's all."

"If one o' them ere Sand Spaniards comes for to go to lift the small end o' his little finger," croaked Kitt, "down he goes like a load o' brick."

"Now, you fellows," said Dick Dart, sternly, "you've no business aboard this craft, and I want you to leave. Away you go to starboard. Forward—march!"

The smugglers hesitated.

"What!" exclaimed Dick; "you hesitate? Then I'll blow you all to perdition in a hurry!"

He tightened the lanyard.

The smugglers knew that death awaited the greater part of their number if they disobeyed, and they started for the rail.

Dick turned the gun so that its muzzle looked at them wherever they went.

They clustered in groups by the rail.

"Overboard with you!" cried Dick.

The smugglers hesitated.

"What! you won't?" exclaimed Dick. "Very good! I don't know that I have any objection to blowing you all to atoms. Here goes!"

He made a motion to fire the gun.

With a yell of rage the smugglers leaped headlong over the side, plunged into the bay,

and struck out with all speed towards their boats.

"Ho, ho!" roared old Ben. "Try it again, my hearties!"

"Go to the devil!" roared the leader of the smugglers. "Wait till we get our boats and we'll board you quicker than lightning."

"I'm afraid that's true enough," muttered Dick. "The only way to get the best of them was by catching them in a bunch. If they come from two directions and spread out it's all day with us."

"Sartain," agreed old Ben.

"Wonder what they've done with the crew?"

"Pitched 'em overboard or thrown 'em in the run," volunteered Kitt.

"Watch here, while I go between decks and see."

Going to the hatchway, Dick groped his way to the run.

The first voice he heard was old Sam Sawyer's.

"There's been the devil to pay above there," said Sam. "I hope them Sand Spaniards have gone to fightin' among themselves. If they eat each other up, there'll be some chance for us, I reckon."

"Hallo, Sam Sawyer!" said Dick.

"Blow me for a porpoise," muttered old Sam, "if that ain't Mr. Dart's voice, knock my brains out wi' a belayin' pin."

"Right you are, my hearty. Would you like to come out of that?"

"Ay—ay! But how the devil did ye get here? What've ye done wi' the smugglers?"

"Licked 'em and pitched 'em overboard."

Drawing his knife, Dick cut the cords that bound the men and led the way to the deck.

In a few words he explained the situation of affairs.

Quickly arming themselves, they awaited the attack which they were sure the smugglers, in their rage, would make.

They were none too soon.

Kitt Cutlash was watching on the starboard side, Ben Bowline on the larboard.

The crew had hardly armed themselves when old Ben whispered:

"That's a boat full o' men just a-coming out o' the darkness."

"Stand by to repel boarders," whispered Dick.

"Halloo! Here comes another," sang out Kitt Cutlash, in a shrill whisper.

"By Heaven, we're going to have a tug of it," exclaimed Dick. "We must divide our force. Half go to the right, half to the left. Beat the rascals back!"

The men took their stations, each with a cutlass in his right hand and a pistol in his left.

"Don't fire a shot till they're alongside," whispered Dick. "Then cut and slash like the devil. Work lively, for they outnumber us, and they're tough customers when their blood's up."

At that instant the voice of the leader of the smugglers was heard from the larboard flatboat.

"Be lively, my gallant fellows. Get on board before they can release the crew, and the cutter's ours, without a blow."

Crash!

The boats struck against the cutter's sides.

"Up with you!" shouted the leader.

"Repel boarders!" exclaimed Dick.

"Hal! By Heaven, they've released the others," cried the smuggler leader. "Upon them, my brave boys! Cleave the government hounds to the chin."

"Beat the villains back!" cried Dick.

The smugglers swarmed up the sides.

Slash, slash!

Crack, crack!

The battle had commenced in earnest.

The scene became pandemonium. Yells and curses broke from the smugglers, shouts and cries of encouragement from the crew of the cutter.

The fight was about equal. First the advantage was on this side, then on that.

Suddenly a thud was heard as some object struck the stern of the cutter.

It was a third flat-boat of the smugglers with a crew of ten men.

Instantly they swarmed on deck and rushed into the thick of the fight.

It now became one-sided.

The crew of the cutter were contending against more than double their number.

Eventually they must be overcome. It was only a question of time how long they could hold out.

But not one of them thought of surrender. The cutter's crew had now been forced back from the rail on each side, and the fight became concentrated on a small portion of the quarter deck.

The cutter's men were nearer the windlass. The leader of the smugglers had caught up a cutlass, and now he rushed upon Dick Dart. Dick did not shrink from the encounter. With set teeth he awaited the onset.

"Die, you government hound!" shrieked the smuggler.

His form towered up, and his features were convulsed with rage.

He delivered a fearful blow at Dick's head. Parrying the blow easily our hero sprang aside, and before the smuggler could recover brought his cutlass down.

It struck the smuggler fair on the forehead, splitting his head open.

His immense form crashed down upon the deck, dead before it struck.

The smugglers uttered roars of rage. The death of their leader seemed to have maddened them.

"Stand for one moment longer, my lads!" cried Dick. "Don't think I'm deserting you. I go to save you!"

Dashing forward he seized the fore-castle gun, and aimed it at the center of the smuggling group.

The smugglers could not see this movement, for the cutter's men were between the gun and them.

Dick seized the lanyard.

"Down, my lads!" he shouted. "Down as quick as lightning."

Old Ben and Kitt, who were in the thick of the fray, comprehended what was to be done.

They repeated the order and dropped upon deck, followed by the remainder of the crew.

In their astonishment at this maneuver, the smugglers stood for an instant spell-bound.

That instant accomplished their destruction.

Dick pulled the lanyard.

Bang!

There was a flash of flame, a loud and deafening report, and then the charge of buckshot and 3 B's tore through the closely crowded ranks of the smugglers.

Fully half of them went down and more were slightly wounded by that terrific discharge.

The shrieks of the wounded and dying rent the air.

"Up and upon them, my lads!" rang out Dick Dart's clear and clarion voice. "One last blow now, and the cutter's ours."

"Hurrah—hurrah—hurrah! Dart forever!" Springing to the front, Dick led the charge.

But it was no longer a battle—it was a rout. Terror had entered the hearts of the smugglers at the fearful slaughter that had overtaken them.

With wild cries they broke and fled.

Rushing to the rail, they plunged into the bay and struck out for land, some swimming towards the beach, and others for the Great Sedge.

The men rushed to the side, intending to fire whenever a head appeared above water.

"Hold!" cried Dick Dart. "That would be murder. The men are incapable of defense. Let them go!"

"Ay—ay!" said Old Ben. "Let 'em go, my lads. They've had enough of it, I'm thinking. And they'll keep as far from the cutter after this as they would from the plague."

Shrieks and groans broke from the wounded on deck.

"Attend to them, my lads," said Dick. "Care for the wounded smugglers as well as for our own men. Do as well as you can for 'em to-night, and at daylight we'll send to the main for Dr. Hankinson. I'll go down into the cabin and see what has become of the officers and Jennie Harding."

He hurried to the cabin.

On the floor lay Brott, nearly frightened to death by the commotion on deck, shaking and trembling.

Dick cut his cords. Brott sprang to his feet.

He did not at first recognize Dick.

He fell on his knees.

"Don't murder me, good Mr. Smuggler!" he gasped. "I've got blue blood in my veins, and the government will avenge my death. Don't kill me—please don't, good, noble sir."

"Shut up, you coward!" said Dick, giving him a sounding kick. "Are you so frightened that you can't see? I'm Dick Dart."

"Good God! I thought you were drowned."

"Not much. Where's the lieutenant?"

"In his state-room—dead, for all I know."

Dick rushed into the state-room. The lieutenant was bound hand and foot and crouching down in his berth. When he saw Dick he uttered a howl of horror.

"Away from me!" he shrieked. "Have you, too, come to torment me? Back, ye fiend, to the regions of the dead."

"Never been there yet," said Dick coolly. "Of course you didn't try to send me there—oh, no! But I'll return good for evil. I'll set you free, anyhow."

Dick cut the ropes, and without speaking further, left the state-room.

"Alive—alive!" gasped the lieutenant, with staring eyes. "Death and fury, he is my evil genius!"

Dick went to Jennie Harding's state-room. He knocked on the door.

"What is it?" asked a weak voice.

"Better say *who* is it? It's Dick Dart."

"Thank God! thank God!"

The door was opened. Jennie appeared. In an instant she ran to Dick's side and clung to him too much overjoyed to speak.

"Curses!" gritted a hoarse voice.

They looked around and saw the lieutenant with a face of a demon glowering upon them.

CHAPTER XXV.

"HA—ha!" shrieked the hag, as she stood on the edge of the quagmire. "You're doomed—doomed—doomed! You'll sink down—down—down! until the mud gets into your mouth and then you'll choke to death, ho—ho—ho!"

The solitude of the vast swamp re-echoed with her fiendish laughter.

She swung the lantern around her head, and shrieked with devilish glee.

With her gray hair flying in the breeze and her only garment a filthy night-dress, she resembled a fiend incarnate.

The sight maddened Charlie Fisher.

He made another desperate effort to extricate himself.

It only resulted in sending both him and Nellie still deeper into the mire.

"Help! oh, help!" cried Nellie, appealing to the hag.

The old woman laughed until the lantern danced up and down.

"Ye got in yerselves!" she shrieked. "Get out the same!"

"You she-fiend!" cried Charlie, "will you see the girl die before your eyes? If you don't want to help me, get her out anyway."

"She ran away—she ran away!" screamed the hag. "He, he! She's safe enough now, though; and she'll stay in the mud one while, I'll warrant ye. Till doomsday—till the day of judgment—and not a minute more or less."

But the appearance of glee suddenly left her, and her countenance lengthened.

What would Brott say about this? By the girl's death he gained nothing. If she lived, and he made her his wife, he would be the gainer of half a million.

Clearly it was to Brott's interest that she should live.

The first violence of her passion—which really crazed her for a moment—passed, she saw this plainly.

She determined to rescue Nellie, if possible.

"Well, I'll help ye out!" she exclaimed.

"But how am I to do it? That's the question."

"Throw a rail, a log, anything solid to us."

Searching around by the aid of the lantern, the hag found a log about ten feet long and several inches in diameter.

Dragging it to the edge of the quagmire, she lifted it up on end and toppled it over.

It fell within reach of Charlie.

"Take hold," he said to Nellie. "Try as hard as you can to lift yourself out. I'll assist you."

By their combined efforts Nellie succeeded in drawing herself from the mire and getting upon the log.

The effort sent Charlie deeper into the mire.

He sank down nearly to his armpits. Nellie reached out her hand to him.

"Now I'll help you," she said.

"No, no! Reach the firm land first, and then I'll try to follow. The log won't bear the weight of both."

"That's so," croaked the hag. "You come out first, or you'll both sink yet."

Yielding to the force of the arguments of both, Nellie crept along the log to firm land.

As soon as she was safe, Charlie tried to pull himself out.

But he had sunk deeper, and could not get a firm hold on the log.

The suction of the mud was great.

Try as he would, he could not overcome it.

Every movement only made matters worse. He sank little by little, until his shoulders hardly showed above the mud.

The hag had been watching every motion with interest.

"Hold still!" she now exclaimed. "I'll help ye. But I'll have to move the log—it ain't right for ye now."

By the strenuous exertion of her great strength she succeeded in pulling the log to land.

Instead of toppling it over again and throwing it in proper position, she put her foot on it and stood looking at Charlie.

"What are you waiting for?" he demanded.

"For you to sink and disappear."

"Merciful Heaven! don't you intend to help me?"

"Yes, to die. I'm going to stop here until you sink, which I think will be in about ten minutes."

"Oh, you monster!"

"Ha, ha!" shrieked the hag. "That's the name! Yes, that's the name! A monster! But the monster's on dry land, while you'll be out o' sight in just ten minutes. He, he! Ho, ho!"

Nellie, who, overcome with exhaustion, had lain down, sprang to her feet at these horrible words of the fiendish old woman.

"He shall not die!" she exclaimed. "If you'll not save him I will!"

With a quick spring she pushed the old woman away and caught hold of the log.

The hag gave utterance to a shriek of anger.

Leaping forward, she caught Nellie by her long and flowing hair.

"Stand back!" she shrieked. "I say he shall die, and die he shall!"

A terrible struggle commenced.

Nellie did her best; but she was no match for the old woman.

Even at her best, her strength was not equal to that of the hag, and now that she was weakened by her struggle in the mire, she was but a child in her hands.

In a moment she was overcome.

With her left hand clutching Nellie's hair, and her right swinging the lantern, the old woman commenced to drag her back towards the cabin.

Once or twice she commenced to intercede for Charlie Fisher's life.

At last the hag turned on her fiercely.

"If you say one word more, I'll brain you on the spot," she hissed.

The fiendish glare of her eyes convinced Nellie that the fearful old woman meant what she said.

She walked on passive after that, but in her heart she never ceased praying for poor Charlie.

When they arrived at the cabin, the hag thrust Nellie inside, and closed the door.

"There you are," she croaked. "And if I give you a chance to escape again, I'll give them leave to murder me to-morrow. No—no, my lady! I'm up to your tricks now, and I'll find a way to thwart 'em."

Going to a closet, she took from it a bundle of rope. With it she approached Nellie.

"What are you going to do with that?" asked the trembling girl.

"I'm going to tie ye up," hissed the hag. "I'm going to tie ye up so tight that ye can't move."

"Please, don't do that."

"Will ye swear on the Bible not to run away again?"

"No."

"Then I'll tie you so tightly that the cords will bring the blood."

Nellie interposed no further objections.

"Very well," she said. "You are the stronger, and, of course, I submit to your brutal will. But see the condition I am in. At least allow me to get some of this mud off me first."

To this the old woman made no objection. She brought buckets of water, which Nellie used lavishly.

The old woman gave her some of her own filthy skirts to wear while hers were drying.

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Steady, when this was done, "I'm going to get some sleep, and you must be tied up."

Nellie made no resistance, for she knew it would be futile.

Mrs. Steady drew a chair close to Nellie's and sat down upon it.

Then after tying the girl's wrists and ankles tightly, she wound the rope several times around her own and Nellie's body and fastened the ends securely to her own chair.

"There," she muttered, in a tone of satisfaction. "By this time that rascal who thought to help you escape from here is out of sight in the mud, and dead. You're fixed so that it is impossible to escape, and everything is working like a charm, after all. And now that my mind is easy, I think I'll go to sleep."

Her eyes closed, and sitting bolt upright in her chair, she fell fast asleep and commenced snoring loudly.

We will return now to Charlie Fisher, who, poor fellow, on account of his perilous situation, certainly needs our attention.

When the old woman disappeared, dragging Nellie after her, he for the moment gave way to despair.

For a short time he could perceive the lantern's gleam, but soon that entirely disappeared, and he was indeed alone in that awful position.

Must he, then, die?

Must he slowly sink down into the fearful quagmire in which he was slowly settling, until it sucked him entirely under and choked out his young life?

The thought was terrible, and in his agony he shrieked for help.

There was no answer; and no sound was heard except the sighing of the night wind through the branches of the cedars.

The sorrowful sighing seemed to be the chanting of his requiem above the frightful sepulchre where he was to be entombed forever.

To add to the horror of the situation, what little light there had been was now obscured by one of those dense, black thunder clouds, which come up from the horizon so suddenly in those latitudes.

It made the swamp so dark that he could not see his hand when it was held before his eyes.

With a last cry of despair he threw his hands above his head with a gesture of abandonment.

Ah, what was that? His hand touched something.

He clutched at and held it.

It was the slender twig from one of the branches of a cedar tree that grew on the solid ground several feet behind him.

The touch sent through him a thrill of hope.

Little by little he drew towards him the slender twig, until he grasped the limb from which it grew, and of which it was a part.

The young branches of the swamp cedar, when green, are very tough. They bend easily, but it is almost impossible to break them.

Exerting his strength gradually, and working his body to and fro in the mud, little by little he drew himself out.

Retaining his hold on the branch, he made gradual progress until the solid ground was reached.

Staggering forward a few feet, he sank down at the foot of the tree whose branches had saved him.

And then, with a tremendous crash of thunder and a vivid glare of lightning, the shower was ushered in.

When it ceased the swamp was a vast flood.

The clouds did not clear away, but a drizzling mist continued falling.

The swamp was still as dark as pitch.

Rising, Charlie started on his quest in search of Nellie Harding. He knew, from what she and the old woman had said, that she was a prisoner in a hut in the swamp, and that it was near by.

For hours he plunged through the swamp, often falling into mud holes and extricating himself with difficulty, until, thoroughly exhausted at last, he did what he should have done at first—he sat down and waited for the light of morning to guide him in his search.

Morning came, but it assisted him very little.

The sky was still overcast—he could not see the sun. He could not tell the points of the compass.

Had he been a woodsman he would not have been at a loss, for the formation of the

cedars and their mosses would have given him his bearings.

But these indications, which are so plain to one who is accustomed to the swamps, was lost on him.

A heavy wind was blowing, and its roaring through the tops of the cedars drowned all other sounds.

Suddenly the wind lulled.

He then became conscious of a dull, heavy, roaring sound.

It was the sound of the surf of the Atlantic, as it dashed upon the beach.

Walking forward in the direction of the sound, he came out upon the edge of the meadow.

The first object that met his gaze was a boat which had entered the river and was being rowed toward the shore.

In the boat were four men and a woman.

With a cry of surprise Charlie dodged back behind a cedar.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed, "it's the cutter's jolly boat. And in it are the lieutenant, Brott, two of the most rascally of the cutter's crew, and a woman. What infernal game are they up to now, I wonder? I'll watch and see."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE lieutenant's brutal face was uglier than usual, as he saw the position in which Dick Dart and Jennie Harding stood.

"I'll have no love-making aboard this craft!" he exclaimed, in a snarling tone.

"How are you going to help it?" asked Dick.

"By Heaven, I'll show you, you cur!" roared the lieutenant.

He caught Dick by the shoulder and endeavored to thrust him aside.

Our hero stood firm as a rock. It would have required a stronger man than the lieutenant to move him.

"Hands off!" he exclaimed, shaking himself free. "You're my superior officer, but that doesn't give you the right to knock me about. Try it again and I'll tumble you head-over-heels."

The lieutenant drew back.

"Brott," he exclaimed, "I order you to knock that mutinous rascal down."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Dick. "Better not try it, Brott. You've felt the weight of my fist before, and I advise you not to tempt me a second time. I say, Brott, you look like a sick wolf of the ugliest species. What's the matter with your ear?"

Brott sneaked into the state-room, making no answer.

"Miss Harding, go to your state-room!" roared the lieutenant.

"I shall do nothing of the kind, sir. I am not your prisoner, but your guest, and as such I shall certainly pay no attention to your orders."

"Very well. Dart, go on deck. Dare to refuse and I'll report you for disobedience of orders."

"Of course I'll obey orders."

"I'll go on deck too," said Jennie.

"You'd better not," said Dick. "There are a great many dead and wounded men up there, and things are not in just the condition to be seen by you."

"Of course I'll do as you say," said Jennie, in a tone that set the lieutenant raging.

She turned her back upon the lieutenant and went into her state-room.

Dick went on deck.

The lieutenant followed, received an account of the repulse of the smugglers, left Dick in charge of the deck and returned to the cabin.

He hurried to Brott's state-room.

"Brott!" he exclaimed, "that infernal Dick Dart has got the upper hand. Jennie Harding is already head-over-heels in love with him."

"It don't require more than one eye to see that," grumbled Brott, who sat nursing his sick ears.

"We must get her away to-morrow morning."

"We must," said Brott.

In the morning, about ten o'clock, word was passed forward to Dick, who was on the fore-castle deck talking to Ben Bowline and Kitt Cutlash, that he was wanted aft.

He went immediately.

"Dart," said the lieutenant, "I shall hereafter keep a scouting party on the beach to look after the smugglers."

"A good plan," said Dick.

"Your comments are unnecessary, sir. You and that old fool Ben Bowline and the skeleton Cutlash seem to have a propensity to go ashore, and I shall send you to-day. Take rations to last until sundown. Watch the road leading from John Allen's tavern through the barberry bushes. You will start at once and return at sundown."

"Ay—ay, sir!"

Dick bade Jennie Harding good-bye, went on deck, summoned Kitt and old Ben, got into the skiff, pulled ashore and were soon lost to view among the bushes.

In about half an hour the lieutenant sought an interview with Jennie Harding.

"Get ready to go ashore, Miss Harding," he said.

"Go ashore! What do you mean? I have no wish to go on shore just now."

"I am sorry to put you to any inconvenience," said the lieutenant, with studied politeness, "but the fact is we are about to commence operations against the smugglers which will endanger the lives of all on board the cutter. I must insist that you allow us to place you in safe quarters on shore without delay."

"Oh, very well," said Jennie, curtly; "if you don't want me here, of course I can go."

The lieutenant bowed.

"How long will it take you to get ready?" he asked.

"Ten minutes, sir."

The lieutenant went on deck and ordered the worst two men in the cutter to arm themselves and go aboard of the jolly-boat.

Brott took his seat in the bow.

Jennie came on deck with a valise. The lieutenant tossed it into the boat, handed Jennie in, and took his seat beside her in the stern-sheets.

"Give way, men!"

The jolly-boat shot across the bay, heading toward the mouth of Forked river.

The lieutenant cast sly looks of exultation at Jennie.

"Aha! my lady," he said to himself, "at last you are in the toils, from which there is no escape. And this very night, by fair means or foul, I shall become the happy possessor of a wife and half a million of money. Ha! ha! I care very little whether 'tis foul or fair."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"As sure as fate that girl is some relation to Nellie Harding," muttered Charlie Fisher, as the jolly-boat passed so near that he had a fair view of its occupants. "Who is she and where could they have picked her up? Well, they're going up the creek, that's certain, and I'll follow."

He was snugly ensconced out of sight behind a cedar.

Rowing past within twenty feet of him, they continued on their course up the creek.

Stealing out from behind the tree, Charlie commenced following the boat, which, on account of the turnings of the creek, moved so slowly that he could easily keep abreast of it.

Keeping out of sight behind the cedars and underbrush, Charlie glided stealthily along.

When the thickest of the swamp was reached Jennie Harding began to grow suspicious.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded. "Surely there is no hotel in this dismal swamp."

"Certainly not," said the lieutenant; "but the landing is a short distance further up, and the road to the village leads from it through the swamp."

Jennie said nothing more, but her suspicions were not set at rest, by any means.

At the spot to which Brott had taken Nellie in the skiff they went ashore.

With Brott leading the way, the lieutenant walking at Jennie's side, and the two villainous sailors bringing up the rear, they plunged into the swamp.

Suddenly Jennie paused.

"I don't like this!" she exclaimed. "I will go no further with you into such a place."

"Good!" muttered Charlie Fisher from his hiding-place, a few yards to the eastward. "You're getting your eyes opened to the danger, and that's half the battle."

"You'll go where I choose to take you!" angrily exclaimed the lieutenant.

Jennie planted her feet firmly on the turf.

"I shall not stir a step!" she exclaimed.

"We'll see," sneered the lieutenant.

He threw his arm around her for the purpose of forcing her along.

But he had not counted the cost.

Instantly he staggered back with a roar of pain, and a scratch across the ball of his right eye, that for the present, if not forever, effectually destroyed the sight of that useful member.

"Stand back, sir!" exclaimed Jennie. "I'll teach you that I know how to defend myself."

"Ha-ha!" chuckled Charlie Fisher, behind the bushes. "What a little tiger-cat it is, to be sure."

The lieutenant uttered a cry of rage.

He gave a signal to the two sailors.

Instantly they darted forward, and before Jennie knew what they were about, seized her around the waist.

For a moment Charlie thought of interfering; but he realized that it would be madness, and utterly destroy his chances hereafter.

He clenched his teeth and remained still.

Jennie struggled hard, but it was no use. The sailors lifted her in their arms, and held her as easily as if she had been a child.

"Aha!" exclaimed the lieutenant, with an oath. "Now, perhaps, you'll learn to behave yourself. Bring her along, my lads."

While this by-play was taking place, Brott had not said a word, but stood looking on, apparently unconcerned.

When the lieutenant received the scratch, he uttered a short chuckle, and his mouth expanded into a fiendish grin.

As soon as Jennie was secured, he paid no further attention to them, but turned and led the way at a quick pace into the depths of the swamp.

He did not pause until he reached the cabin of the old hag.

Here he paused and waited for the others to come up.

"Stay outside until I go in and see how things are inside," he said to the lieutenant.

Opening the door without knocking, he found the old woman busy about the stove, and Nellie Harding sitting on a chair, bound hand and foot.

"What in the name of the fiend does this mean, old woman?" he demanded.

"Oho, my gallant lad, you're back, are you?" croaked the hag. "I'm glad you are—I am, indeed; for I never had so much trouble with a girl as I've had with this one in all my mortal days."

Thereupon she told all that had occurred in his absence.

Brott glared angrily at Nellie.

"So you tried to escape, did you, after all the promises you made to me?" he demanded.

"Yes, I did," said Nellie. "But it wasn't because I wanted to run away from you."

"What was the reason?"

"Because I hate and fear this wretched old woman. I don't consider my life safe with her an instant."

"And you're willing to keep your promise to me?"

"Certainly."

"Very well," said Brott. "I really can't blame you for being afraid of Mrs. Steady. She isn't very beautiful, and her manners are not calculated to inspire confidence, that's a fact. I'll untie you."

He set Nellie free.

"I've brought you a visitor," he said.

"Who?"

"Your sister Jennie."

Nellie sprang to her feet. She uttered an exclamation of joy. She was about to rush to the door, when Brott detained her.

"Wait," he said. "I'll bring her in."

He opened the door, and ushered in the party outside.

In an instant Nellie and Jennie were in each other's arms.

"Very pretty," sneered the lieutenant. "Now sit down, the whole of you, and let's talk business."

His wounded eye was causing him intense pain, and his face was purple with rage as he spoke.

In the meantime Charlie Fisher had crept as near as he dared, and lay concealed in the bushes while the lieutenant, the two sailors, and Jennie remained outside.

When they entered the house he left his cover.

Making his way stealthily to the back part of the house, he found a crevice wide enough to admit of his seeing and hearing all that was going on inside.

The lieutenant opened the ball.

"Now let's to business!" he exclaimed, savagely, binding a silk handkerchief over his

wounded eye. "Miss Jennie Harding, you are wholly in my power."

"And Miss Nellie Harding is in mine," said Brott.

"Yes; and we have made up our minds that they shall be our wives."

"Have you?" asked Jennie, quietly.

"That's all very well on your side, I dare say. But you forget that it takes two to make a bargain of that kind."

"Very true. But I think you will come to the conclusion that it is to your interest to consent."

He looked fiendishly at Jennie as he said this, and his expression was so brutal that it sent a thrill of terror through her.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"I mean," he hissed, "that if you don't become my wife this night, before many days you will beg and plead of me upon your bended knees to make you so, and I shall then refuse."

"Oh, Heaven! Are you a perfect fiend?"

"I am anything you choose. Now take your choice. Will you marry me or not?"

"No, you wretch! No, you monster! I trust myself in the hands of the Almighty, who will not suffer such a villain as you to conquer."

The lieutenant uttered a deep curse.

Brott seemed to enjoy the scene.

"Never fear, lieutenant," he said. "She'll come to terms after thinking of it awhile. Her sister has come to the conclusion that it will not pay to resist, and has promised to marry me. Haven't you, my dear Nellie?"

"Yes," said Nellie, placidly.

"For shame!" exclaimed Jennie. "Nellie, I am ashamed of you—I am ashamed of you. I will die before I submit."

"So would I," said Nellie, quietly. "But there is a fate which young girls should consider worse than death."

Jennie shuddered. She hid her face in her hands.

"By Heaven!" muttered Charlie Fisher, "Nellie Harding is playing some deep game. I don't believe she has the slightest idea of marrying Brott. Why can't that sister of hers see it and help to fool the rascals?"

"If you will let me talk to Jennie a minute I think I could induce her to look upon the thing as I do," said Nellie to the lieutenant.

"Very well. You're a sensible girl. Go ahead."

Nellie took Jennie's hand and led her to the corner of the room furthest away from the others.

It was the very corner where Charlie Fisher was looking through his chink.

Nellie commenced talking to her sister in low tones.

Charlie took a small piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket.

He wrote as follows:

"Promise anything—everything—but delay the marriage as long as you can. Manage to put it off till eight o'clock—before the time comes you shall be rescued."

The girls were between the chink and the others who were in the room.

Pushing the paper through the chink, Charlie held it with the tips of his fingers so that it would attract attention.

Nellie saw it.

She took it cautiously and read it.

With a flush of joy upon her face, she passed it to Jennie.

"All is not yet lost," she whispered. "I have been fighting against time. I have consented to gain time. Promise to become the wife of the lieutenant and I will manage all the rest."

"I will. You have been right, after all."

Refolding the paper, Nellie pushed it again through the chink.

They might be searched by the old hag, and it would not do to have the paper found upon them.

Going back to their chairs, they sat down.

"My sister has consented," said Nellie.

"Ha!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "She consents to become my wife?"

"I do."

"By George!" exclaimed Brott, "I don't know about that. Are you sure you're not both up to some game? If I thought that, I'd—"

"Be quiet," said Nellie. "She consents because she can't help herself, that's all."

"Very good," said Brott. "That's a sensible way to look at it, I'm sure. The next question is, when is the thing to be done?"

"Oh, in a few days."

"A few dasys be dashed!" roared the lieutenant. "It shall be done this very afternoon."

Nellie saw that he was determined.

"We'll compromise," she said. "Say eight o'clock to-night. I'll not be married a minute sooner, and that's flat."

"All right," said Brott. "At eight o'clock, then, let it be, and by a justice of the peace. I don't trouble the preachers much—I've no use for 'em. Lieutenant, come outside. You two fellows keep your eyes open."

The lieutenant and Brott went outside and closed the door.

"Those girls are up to some deep game or other," said Brott. "We mustn't give them a shadow of a chance, or they'll be off as quick as lightning, and we'll have the trouble of looking 'em up."

"Yes, curse 'em! I believe to heaven my eye is running out. Confound the Tartar, I'd give something if we could only get the money without the women."

"Can't be done," said Brott. "Now, lieutenant, if you'll stay here and help guard the girls I'll pay a visit to an old squire I know in the village. For a consideration he'll tie the knot whether they like it or not, and be ready to swear afterwards on a stack of bibles that they were willing and anxious. I'll be back with him before eight o'clock, ready to have the thing done up brown at the exact hour."

Brott turned away, walked into the thick swamp and disappeared in the direction of the upland.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE conversation between Brott and the lieutenant had not been heard by Charlie, who was on the opposite side of the building.

Neither did he see Brott when he walked away.

But he was soon informed upon the subject.

The lieutenant entered the house, glared angrily around, slammed the door and after rubbing his wounded eye exclaimed:

"Brott has gone after the official who is to marry us. He is a man who will stand no fooling, but will pronounce the ceremony whether you like it or not. Make no fuss when he comes, or I swear you shall repent it in sackcloth and ashes before you're many hours older."

He sat down, commenced to nurse his eye and glared angrily at them.

"When is he coming?" asked Nellie.

"Before eight o'clock."

"You may rest assured there's no use of his coming before night," said Nellie, pointedly. "And so I tell you and every one else who hears me."

Charlie Fisher heard her, as she intended that he should.

Had he known that Brott was intending to make a journey across the swamp, he would have intercepted him.

But it was now too late.

He knew that Dick Dart was on board the cutter, for he heard the crew mention as much when they were searching for him on the Great Sedge.

With the lieutenant and Brott away, Dick would be in command, and he had no doubt, at least, he, Kitt Cutlash and Ben Bowline would return with him to the swamp.

Gliding stealthily into the swamp, Charlie made his way to the landing.

Pushing the skiff from the bank, he shoved down the creek until he could use the oars.

Then he sat down on the seat, shipped his oars and rowed across the bay.

Meanwhile, on the cutter there had been unusual excitement since the lieutenant and Brott, with the worst scoundrels of the crew, rowed across the bay with Jennie Harding.

"Bill-ee," said old Sam Sawyer to his chum, "it's my opinion the devil's to pay."

"Sam-ee," said old Bill, "it are."

Which showed the state of feeling on board the cutter.

When the jolly-boat was observed crossing the bay with only one occupant, the excitement increased.

The men crowded to the side.

"Harpoon me fer a sparm whale, if it ain't Charlie Fisher!" ejaculated old Sam. "Strand birds and sand pipers! that beats nature!"

"Ahoy, my lad!" roared Sam, as Charlie Fisher came on board. "You've lost yer bearin's, I reckon."

"Is Dick Dart aboard?"

"No; he's on the beach."

"When will he be back?"

"Not afore sundown. What's the row?" Charlie explained.

"Catfish and lamper-eels!" ejaculated Sam. "What's to be done?"

"Nothing until Dick Dart comes aboard."

"Tell ye what," said Sam. "I'll send a man arter him."

This was done immediately, and the man was given instructions to say that Dick was wanted immediately on board.

Charlie went into the galley and sat down to the first meal he had eaten for a long time.

Hours passed and there was no sign of Dick Dart and his party, or the man who had been sent in search of him.

"Charlie," said old Sam at sundown, "it'll be death to me if I lift my hand agin the lieutenant or Brott. But I'm an old man, and can well afford to sacrifice what little of life still remains to me for the sake of them two young girls. I'll go wi' ye and help get 'em out o' the clutches o' the two rascals."

"Wait. Dick will certainly return before dark."

Hardly had he spoken when from the barberry bushes emerged Dick, followed by Kitt, Ben and the sailor.

They were on the run.

Springing on board their boat, they pulled out to the cutter.

Dick was the first to leap on deck.

"Where's Charlie Fisher?" he asked.

"We've just heard the news. We've been away up the beach, and only met the man as we were returning. Tell me the news."

In a moment he was put in possession of the more important facts.

"The girls must be saved!" he cried. "Kitt, Ben, it is death to you for you to lift your hand against a commissioned officer, and I'll not ask you to do it."

"Then I asks myself," roared old Ben; "if so be as I was born to be hanged, I couldn't stretch hemp in a better cause. I'm bound for that there swamp, and so I tell ye."

"That's the talk," croaked Kitt. "If I come for to go for to git them young gals out o' the scrape, and am swung for it, I'll make faces at the lieutenant and Brott, and sass 'em as they tighten the noose around my neck."

"As for me, I'm a deserter, and my life is forfeited at any rate," said Charlie Fisher. "I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, and I want the satisfaction of breaking the lieutenant's head first."

Dick's heart beat high with hope.

"You're brave fellows, one and all," he exclaimed. "Come on, and we'll save the girls if we all die for it afterwards."

They sprang into the jolly-boat and pulled away toward the mouth of Forked river.

"Good luck to ye!" yelled old Sam. "Bill-ee, we'll go below and drink success to 'em in a bucketful o' grog."

We must now follow Brott through the swamp on his way to the village, which he reached in good time.

Going to the tavern, he inquired of Stout Parker, the landlord, if he knew where Mr. Spoon, the justice of the peace, was to be found.

"Ya—as," drawled old Stout. "You'll find him at his house, I reckon. He just come in arter a horn o' applejack, and said he was going home."

"Where does he live?"

The fat landlord waddled to the door and pointed out the house.

Brott hurried there and inquired for Mr. Spoon, who came to the door and asked his business.

"Don't you know me?" asked Brott.

"Never saw you before."

Brott told his name.

"The dickens!" exclaimed Spoon.

He seized Brott's hand and shook it heartily.

"By George! I'm glad to see you, Brott. Walk right in."

"Not just now, thank you. I've some important business with you, Spoon. Put on your hat and come outside while we talk. I don't want our conversation to be overheard."

Arm in arm they strolled down the one street of the village.

"Do you want to make a thousand dollars?"

"You're right I do. Try me and see."

"And you're not particular as to the means, so long as you're not likely to be punished?"

"Devil a bit."

Brott then told what he was expected to do.

"I'm your man," said Spoon, with emphasis.

"If they should happen to object, you must pay no attention to their protests."

"Not a bit of it. Trust me. And I am to have a thousand dollars for my share of the job?"

"You are."

"I'd run the risk of going to the devil for a thousand dollars. I'll tie the knot as tight as the gates of Satan's kingdom. When is the thing to be done?"

"To-night, at eight o'clock."

"All right. Then there's plenty of time. Come back to the house, and the old woman shall get us a bite to eat."

They remained in the house until late in the afternoon, when they started for the swamp.

Arriving at half-past seven, they found everything as they had left it.

The interior of the cabin was dimly lighted up by a tallow dip, which only served to make everything look more dismal.

Brott proceeded to introduce the justice.

"This is Mr. Spoon," he said, addressing himself to Nellie, whom he now looked upon as his own lawful property. "He is authorized by law to perform the ceremony of marriage."

"Certainly, young lady," said Spoon. "And I shall only be too happy to tie the knot good and strong."

"No doubt of it," said Nellie. "How much do you get, Mr. Spoon?"

"Eh?" demanded Spoon, growing red in the face.

"How much are you to be paid?"

"I expect no fee or reward, young lady," said Mr. Spoon, with dignity.

"Of course you don't," said Nellie.

"Well, he'll get something then," snapped Brott, "and now go ahead and let's have the thing over."

"Certainly—certainly. Be good enough to stand up, young ladies, and join hands with your respective grooms."

"Not just yet," said Nellie.

"Why not?" demanded the lieutenant. "Damme! Do you intend to back out at the last moment?"

"The last moment hasn't come yet. I stipulated that nothing should be done until eight o'clock."

"What difference does a few minutes make?" grumbled Brott.

"None, perhaps. If so, say it is my whim."

"Oh, very well," said Brott, drawing out his watch. "It is now exactly twenty minutes to eight. That twenty minutes will we wait, and not another second."

Minute after minute passed.

Not a word was spoken.

The silence of death reigned in the cabin. It was so intense that even the soft ticking of the watch could be heard throughout the room.

The old woman, more fiend-like than ever, sat upon a stool, her elbows upon her knees and her chin resting on her skinny hands, glaring triumphantly upon the girls and occasionally giving utterance to a low, harsh chuckle.

Upon the features of the justice of the peace was a wicked leer.

Brott sat grim and silent, watching the watch.

The lieutenant's face was that of a demon, and occasionally a low curse broke from him as the twinges of pain in his wounded eye became unusually acute.

Nellie Harding's face was very pale, but otherwise she seemed unmoved.

She leaned forward in a listening attitude. Jennie clung to her in terror.

Suddenly Brott's voice broke the silence.

"Time's up," he said. "Mr. Spoon, proceed."

"Stand up, all parties, and join hands."

The lieutenant and Brott came forward, but Nellie never moved.

"Oh, never mind!" said Spoon. "There's nothing in the law that makes it obligatory upon the parties to either arise or join hands."

He continued with the service until the question was reached:

"Wilt thou take this man to be thy lawful husband?"

"No!" cried both girls at once. "Never!"

A fearful curse broke from the lieutenant's lips.

"Destruction!" hissed Brott. "Go on, Spoon! Go on, I tell you. Repeat the ceremony! And we'll soon teach these stubborn vixens whether they are our wives or not!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"HERE we are," whispered Charlie Fisher, as the jolly-boat glided up the creek and reached the landing in the swamp. "Hurry, for your lives. It's nearly eight o'clock, and we may be too late, after all."

"Lead the way!" said Dick, excitedly.

On a run they started into the swamp.

In ten minutes they reached the hut.

"Stay where you are, while I go and see what they're up to," whispered Charlie.

Going softly around the house, he applied his eye to the crevice he had used before.

Hardly had he looked when he left the place and ran back.

His face was paler than usual.

"We're not a minute too soon," he whispered. "We must lose no time. There are four of them inside—the lieutenant, Brott, and the two sailors. I'll manage Brott; you, Dick, take the lieutenant, while Kitt and Ben will attend to the sailors. The other fellow who is repeating the marriage service is small fry and can be attended to afterwards. Away we go."

Dashing open the door, they sprang in upon the scene.

The lieutenant had caught Jennie's hand and was trying to force her to her feet.

Dick sprang upon him.

His clenched fist shot out like a sledge-hammer, and took the lieutenant between the eyes.

He fell like a log.

Dick leaped upon him and seized him by the throat.

"You infernal scoundrel!" he exclaimed.

"Your game's blocked at last!"

"Let me up!" gasped the lieutenant.

"You're choking me to death."

He commenced to get black in the face.

Dick took his pistols from him and pitched him into a corner.

"Lie there, you dog!" he exclaimed. "And if you dare to move, I'll murder you."

In the meantime Charlie had collared Brott.

He soon choked him into submission and he lay cowering like a cur.

Kitt Cutlash and old Ben had no trouble with the sailors.

A loaded pistol placed at their heads ended the affair so far as they were concerned, and they allowed themselves to be quietly disarmed.

Mr. Spoon had made a dash for the door.

But Kitt caught him by the throat as he passed and flung him into the corner, where he lay quiet, afraid to make a movement.

The old woman seized a knife, and sprang at Charlie Fisher, who had Brott down.

Kitt Cutlash noticed the movement.

Leaping forward, he caught her by the throat and sent her flying behind the stove.

"Belay all, old lady!" he croaked. "If ye come for to go for to leave that shot, I'll jump down yer throat and kick ye to pieces, by ginger!"

By this time Jennie and Nellie were very close to Dick and Charlie, overwhelming them with expressions of gratitude.

Affairs having been satisfactorily explained, attention was again directed to the prisoners.

"Tie 'em up," said Dick.

"What!" roared the lieutenant. "Tie me, your superior officer, up! If you dare you shall be hunged for mutiny, by Heaven!"

"That for the hanging," said Dick, snapping his fingers. "I know what I'm about. Kitt, tie him up."

"Ay, ay, sir," croaked Kitt, chuckling.

"And if you come for to go for to make a fuss while I'm a-doing of it, lieutenant, I'll wallop you well, by gravy!"

The lieutenant submitted with very ill grace. Kitt bound his hands securely behind him, and followed suit with Brott, the two sailors, Mr. Spoon and the old woman, receiving two or three scratches from the hag, who used her nails with considerable success.

Mr. Spoon commenced to beg.

"Shut up," said Dick. "Off to the boat with 'em, my lads!"

They were marched to the jolly-boat and tumbled in.

"Where are you going to take us?" whined the lieutenant.

"To the cutter," said Dick, shortly.

The lieutenant laughed in his sleeve. Was it possible Dart was foolish enough to take him among his own men, where he could have

everything his own way and turn the tables instantly?

He could hardly believe it.

But it was possible, nevertheless, for the jolly-boat headed straight for the cutter, reached her, and the prisoners were hauled up.

The crew of the cutter were all drawn up to receive them.

"Release me!" roared the lieutenant, "and arrest these mutinous rascals instantly."

To his surprise not a man stirred.

"Away with them to the cabin," said Dick.

They were forced down below, with the exception of the two sailors, who were sent to the run.

Brott, the lieutenant, and Mr. Spoon were seated by the cabin table.

"Now," said Dick, "you're off my hands, and another actor will make his appearance."

The door of a state-room opened, and a tall, noble-looking man in naval uniform appeared.

The lieutenant uttered a cry and his face turned white as death.

"The admiral!" he gasped.

"Yes," was the reply, in deep, full tones. "I am the admiral. I came down from New York yesterday, to Barnegat Bay, on a shooting and fishing excursion. I concluded this evening that I would pay the cutter a visit, as I learned that you had been having a brush with the smugglers. On the way I met the jolly-boat, with Mr. Dart and a crew aboard. Ascertaining their mission, I told them to take prisoners all they found in the cabin in the swamp and bring them on board the cutter. Lieutenant, there have been grave charges made against you and Mr. Brott. You shall have an opportunity of meeting your accusers face to face. Mr. Dart, stand forward and tell your story."

He did so. Charlie Fisher followed. Then came Nellie and Jennie Harding.

"What have you to say to this?" demanded the admiral.

"It is a lie. The girls went with us of their own accord. They were anxious to have us marry them. They—"

He stopped and uttered a gasping cry.

"My God!" he screamed, "it has appeared again! There—there! Take it away!"

By the side of the curtain stood the specter. Its hand was uplifted and pointed warningly

at the lieutenant. In solemn, threatening tones it spoke this word:

"Confess!"

"I do—I do!" shrieked the cowering wretch.

"Have mercy."

"Yes—yes!"

"Do you confess that you shot Dart in the Pelican thoroughfare?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Do you confess that Brott tried to murder Fisher on the Great Sedge and left him for dead?"

"I do—I do!"

"Do you confess that you and Brott abducted Nellie and Jennie Harding against their will and tried to force them to marry you against their will for the sake of their fortunes?"

"I confess everything—everything!" shrieked the wretched man. "Only leave me—leave me! Torment me no more! Go back to your home among the dead."

The ghost laughed.

"Ha—ha! The farce is ended," it said.

It threw aside the white garment and a mask, and stood revealed old George Larue, captain of the fore-top.

"It's all easily explained," he said. "There is a sliding panel behind the curtain. I discovered it while foraging in the hold. Having a taste for masquerading, I fixed up this rig and made it as horrible as possible. Several times I appeared to the lieutenant, when he was engaged in concocting his plots, always succeeding in frightening him almost to death. As he never had the courage to come towards me until I disappeared, I always had time to slip through the panel, which moved directly back to its place. Several times I was behind the curtain and heard Brott and the lieutenant arranging their plans, and I wish now to add my testimony to that of the others."

"Enough!" said the admiral. "I have already heard sufficient to assure me that two greater villains never went unhung. You can give your evidence before the court-martial in New York, where I shall take these rascals to-morrow. Mr. Spoon and the old woman shall be delivered up to the civil authorities here for trial. Away with the last two to the run, and take the lieutenant and

Brott to their state-rooms and lock them up."

His orders were executed immediately, and two men were directed to stand guard constantly at the doors.

Then the admiral turned to the two girls.

"Miss Jennie and Miss Nellie Harding, would you like to see Mr. Dart made a captain, Mr. Fisher a first lieutenant, Ben Bowline a second lieutenant and Kitt Cutlash a midshipman?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed. None deserve it more than they."

"It lies with you whether they shall be so or not."

"With us! How so?"

"If you, Miss Jennie, become Mr. Dart's wife, and you, Miss Nellie, marry Charlie Fisher, all the commissions shall be made out in less than a week."

"Oh!"

The girls threw a quick glance at Dick and Charlie, then blushed and looked down.

Dick and Charlie looked down.

"What do you say?" asked the admiral, his eyes twinkling.

It would be a pity that they should lose their commissions on our account, after they have done so much for us."

"Then you consent?"

"Ye—es."

That is all. When the end is reached it is time to stop. And we have reached the finish of this story.

The admiral granted Dick and Charlie leave of absence to take Jennie and Nellie to New York. Kitt Cutlash and Ben Bowline went too, and "stood up" at the wedding that soon followed.

The instant the ceremony was completed, the admiral placed their commissions in their hands.

The lieutenant and Brott were tried by court-martial, found guilty, reduced to the ranks and sent to the Dry Tortugas.

The old woman and Mr. Spoon were sent to the State prison by the civil authorities.

Kitt Cutlash and Ben Bowline still flourish and always sail in the same ship.

The lives of Dick Dart, Charlie Fisher, and their pretty wives have been very happy thus far, and we hope they may continue to live happily together to.

[THE END.]

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